

# **Global Counterinsurgency: a Way Out of the Global War On Terrorism Quagmire?**

**A Monograph  
by  
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**AY 07-08**

<b>REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE</b>				<i>Form Approved</i> <b>OMB No. 0704-0188</b>	
Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing this collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden to Department of Defense, Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports (0704-0188), 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to any penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number. <b>PLEASE DO NOT RETURN YOUR FORM TO THE ABOVE ADDRESS.</b>					
<b>1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY)</b> 05-22-2008		<b>2. REPORT TYPE</b> MONOGRAPH		<b>3. DATES COVERED (From - To)</b> Sep 2007- May 2008	
<b>4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE</b>  Global Counterinsurgency: a Way Out of the Global War On Terrorism Quagmire?				<b>5a. CONTRACT NUMBER</b>	
				<b>5b. GRANT NUMBER</b>	
				<b>5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER</b>	
<b>6. AUTHOR(S)</b>  Lieutenant Colonel Michael J. Lee United States Marine Corps				<b>5d. PROJECT NUMBER</b>	
				<b>5e. TASK NUMBER</b>	
				<b>5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER</b>	
<b>7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)</b> School of Advanced Military Studies 250 Gibbon Avenue Fort Leavenworth, KS 66027-2134				<b>8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER</b>	
<b>9. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)</b> Command and General Staff College 100 Stimson Fort Leavenworth, KS 66027				<b>10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)</b> CGSC, SAMS	
				<b>11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)</b>	
<b>12. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT</b>  Approved for Public Release; Distribution is Unlimited					
<b>13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES</b>					
<b>14. ABSTRACT:</b> See Abstract.					
<b>15. SUBJECT TERMS</b> Global Counterinsurgency, Way Out of the Global War, Terrorism					
<b>16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:</b>			<b>17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT</b>  (U)	<b>18. NUMBER OF PAGES</b>  65	<b>19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON</b> COL Stefan Banach
<b>a. REPORT</b> (U)	<b>b. ABSTRACT</b> (U)	<b>c. THIS PAGE</b> (U)			<b>19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER</b> (include area code) (913) 758-3300

# **SCHOOL OF ADVANCED MILITARY STUDIES**

## **MONOGRAPH APPROVAL**

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Title of Monograph: Global Counterinsurgency: a Way Out of the Global War On Terrorism Quagmire?

LtCol M. J. Lee, USMC, defended his monograph on 25 April 2008 and passed: X; passed with revisions: \_\_; Failed: \_\_.

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## **Abstract**

GLOBAL COUNTERINSURGENCY: a Way Out of the GWOT Quagmire? by Lieutenant Colonel Michael J. Lee, USMC, 56 pages.

With the attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup>, by a transnational, global, terrorist network, the full danger of this new security threat was revealed. The initial response of the United States Government to this threat resulted in the birth of the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT). Since its birth the GWOT has taken center stage as the default Foreign Policy and National Security Strategy of the United States. In the execution of this strategic construct the United States has deployed its military instrument of power to two regional conflicts—Afghanistan and Iraq—and numerous other low level, special operations throughout the globe. After more than six years of implementation, this monograph examines the effectiveness of GWOT and its current relevancy as a strategic concept.

The monograph addresses the background and origins of GWOT to include the arguments for and against its usefulness and its strengths and weaknesses as a strategic construct. The monograph specifically examines the current security environment in which the GWOT is being applied and finds it to be insufficient. The monograph proposes that the security environment is more accurately defined as a global insurgency conducted by a transnational terror network with global reach. Further, the best way to address this security environment is to replace the construct of GWOT with a global counterinsurgency (COIN) strategic framework. In doing so, the monograph replaces the primacy of “terror or terrorism” as the overarching threat with a clear identification of the enemy—al Qaeda and associated groups and movements. The research delves into the strategic goals and operational objectives of al Qaeda and assess its effectiveness as a global insurgency using the criteria established by contemporary and historical insurgency theorists, such as David Galula, Bard O’Neill, Steven Metz, Raymond Millen, Bruce Hoffman and many others.

The findings offer insight into a way ahead that provides a more relevant expression of the current security environment and a more practical approach in this resource constrained reality. Significant gaps were discovered when examining COIN theory as a potential strategic framework. Finding strategic bridges for these gaps are necessary for the realization of an effective global COIN strategy. These gaps were identified as areas for further research.

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## Chapter 1—Introduction

As the dust settled over “Ground Zero” in New York, as well as in Washington, D.C. and in a rural field in Pennsylvania, President George W. Bush, only eight months into his presidency, recognized that the United States faced a new and demanding security threat. The greatest challenge facing the President was articulating to a fearful and grieving nation the threat that now existed to the nation and how America would fight back. In a joint session to Congress on 20 September 2001, the President identified and defined for the country a new adversary as, “... a collection of loosely affiliated terrorist organizations known as al Qaeda,” and stated its goal as, “... remaking the world and imposing its radical beliefs on people everywhere.”<sup>1</sup> The President and his National Security Council explicitly identified this new threat as being asymmetrical with a long ranging strategy. A year later, in the resulting National Security Strategy of the United States published in September 2002; the President reiterated this threat and officially pronounced the nation’s priority:

Defending our Nation against its enemies is the first and fundamental commitment of the Federal Government. Today, that task has changed dramatically. Enemies in the past needed great armies and great industrial capabilities to endanger America. Now, shadowy networks of individuals can bring great chaos and suffering to our shores for less than it costs to purchase a single tank. Terrorists are organized to penetrate open societies and to turn the power of modern technologies against us.<sup>2</sup>

Additionally, the President laid out his response to this new elusive enemy by stating that the United States, “... must make use of every tool in our arsenal—military power, better homeland defenses, law enforcement, intelligence, and vigorous efforts to cut off terrorist financing. The war against terrorists of global reach is a global enterprise of uncertain duration.”<sup>3</sup> The United

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<sup>1</sup> Transcript of President Bush's address to a joint session of Congress on Thursday night, September 20, 2001. [www.cnn.com](http://www.cnn.com) (accessed 12 December 2007), 1.

<sup>2</sup> President of the United States. *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*. (Washington D.C.: September 2002), iii.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, iii.

States could not wait for the next surprise attack from the enemy but would instead go on the offensive:

America will help nations that need our assistance in combating terror. And America will hold to account nations that are compromised by terror, including those who harbor terrorists—because the allies of terror are the enemies of civilization. The United States and countries cooperating with us must not allow the terrorists to develop new home bases. Together, we will seek to deny them sanctuary at every turn.<sup>4</sup>

This offensive needed to rely heavily on a military response and focus its attention on terrorism and terrorists. Thus, with the President's declaration on 20 September 2001 of "war" on terrorism with a "global reach" and his reinforcement of this idea in the follow on NSS, the phrase Global War on Terror (GWOT) was born.

## **Monograph Focus and Brief Discussion of GWOT**

This monograph will focus on the GWOT as part of the larger national security strategy (NSS). It will examine both its successes and failures to determine its appropriateness in today's environment of constrained resources, war weariness, and political posturing.

Since September 11, 2001, the GWOT has taken center stage to define the United States' NSS and foreign policy. As a result, the United States has found itself engaged in two regional wars (Operation ENDURING FREEDOM in Afghanistan in late 2001 and Operation IRAQI FREEDOM in early 2003). Both of these operations later transformed into unstable regional challenges that had no quick fix. In Iraq, initial success was met by a complex insurgency that initially caught the U.S. military and the Bush Administration ill-equipped to manage. As Dr. Steven Metz, Chairman of the Regional Strategy and Planning Department and Research Professor of National Security Affairs at the Strategic Studies Institute, observes, "When the United States removed Saddam Hussein from power in the spring of 2003, American policymakers and military leaders did not expect to become involved in a protracted

counterinsurgency campaign in Iraq.”<sup>5</sup> In Afghanistan, the situation is still uncertain and unstable due largely to the U.S. failure to completely eliminate the Taliban and effectively manage the transition of the country to a stable nation state. As Captain Craig Colucci, Headquarters Detachment Commander, Battle Command Training Program, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, writes, “The development of Afghanistan as a successful nation-state is at grave risk, and its failure could have resounding strategic and economic impact on the United States and, indeed, the entire world... as increasing instability threatens to unravel the initial successes achieved after the U.S. invasion in 2001.”<sup>6</sup> Because of this perceived mismanagement, the world’s opinion of the United States and its credibility have suffered. As the casualties and controversies associated with these military campaigns have escalated, American public opinion has become increasingly divided. Confusion exists as to who the enemy is, how best to fight it, and whether or not the results are worth the costs. Recent successes in Iraq as a result of the “surge” have improved public opinion regarding this campaign, but considerable doubt regarding the execution of a GWOT still lingers—both at home and abroad.

Initially, the GWOT, as an example of strategic communications, was highly successful in rallying the country to the cause. However, the simplicity in the message has led to confusion and misleading conclusions regarding the threat and the nation’s strategy to deal with it. One of the reasons for this misunderstanding can be attributed to the contradictions seen in the idealistic rhetoric of the strategy vice the realism required for its effective implementation. Ultimately, this is a failure of strategic communications. According to Lieutenant Colonel Fred Krawchuck, U.S.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., iii-iv.

<sup>5</sup> Steven Metz. “Learning From Iraq: Counterinsurgency in American Strategy.” *Strategic Studies Institute* (January 2007). <http://www.StrategicStudiesInstitute.army.mil/html> (accessed August 15, 2007), 16-17.

<sup>6</sup> Captain Craig C. Colucci, U.S. Army. “Committing to Afghanistan: The Case for Increasing U.S. Reconstruction and Stabilization Aid,” *Military Review: The Professional Journal of the U.S. Army*, vol LXXVII, no. 3 (May-June 2007), 38.



Army Special Forces officer, Olmsted Scholar in Spain, and an Army Senior Fellow with the U.S.

Department of State:

The United States government faces a formidable challenge when it comes to strategic communication. Not everyone recognizes or fully appreciates the subtleties and complexities of strategy in today's environment. The United States defense establishment is comfortable with fighting a conventional war, and is uncomfortable with the ambiguity of unconventional warfare.<sup>7</sup>

The mischaracterization in the expression of a GWOT is a fundamental lack of understanding regarding the nature of the conflict. Additionally, the apprehension displayed by the defense establishment in its effort to manage and prosecute the GWOT over the past six years exposes the need for a new approach.

### **Scope, Limitations, and Assumptions**

The purpose of this monograph is to bring coherence to the strategic environment by fully examining the issues that have led to current misperceptions. It will offer insights into the nature of the conflict, provide clarity as to who the enemy is, and will show the manner in which they achieve their ends. Ultimately, the objective is to provide a potential framework to advance the concept of the GWOT into a more relevant approach. This monograph is neither intended to be a universal remedy for the complex security challenges facing the United States, nor will it deny the existence of other viable approaches. Time and effort will not allow a complete accounting of the full spectrum of Defense Department responsibilities expressed in the latest Quarterly Defense Review. Therefore, this study will not concern itself with all aspects of the NSS, but rather only that portion that seeks to "defeat global terrorism." It is assumed that the reader is familiar with the activities associated with the GWOT, as well as the tragedy of September 11, 2001, and its impact on the security issues facing the United States.

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<sup>7</sup> Fred T. Krawchuck. "Strategic Communications: An Integral Component of Counterinsurgency Operations." *The Quarterly Journal* (Winter 2006), 35-36.

## **Research Question and Methodology**

The research question at hand is: Does the GWOT sufficiently describe the nature of the conflict and properly account for the realities of the strategic environment? This study proposes that it does not and it will prove that the true nature of the conflict is a fight against a transnational terrorist organization (al Qaeda and its affiliated movements) who is conducting a global insurgency. Consequently, the United States and its allies are facing a global insurgency in which some theaters of operations have already crossed into open conflict and other potential theaters where such hostilities are still latent. Since the GWOT is ambiguous to this viewpoint, it proves to be inadequate to meet the challenges of the “Long War”, too militaristic in its approach and is focused too heavily on the tactic of terror. By clearly defining the enemy as an insurgent organization and the nature of the war as an insurgency, a more effective approach can be devised. Secondary research questions include; how and why was the GWOT conceived? How successful has the conduct of the GWOT been to date, and what are its shortcomings? Can global terror or terrorism be a realistic adversary and is its defeat truly achievable? What is the true nature of the threat that faces the nation and what is the authentic nature of the conflict being conducted? How successful has the enemy been in achieving its goals to date and what is the best approach for the U.S. to achieve a satisfactory outcome in this “Long War”?

Chapter 1 introduces the research topic and provides a brief contextual background explaining the birth of the GWOT. It provides the scope, limitations, and assumptions of the study; and provides the research question to be answered and the methodology that will be used. Chapter 2 examines the GWOT as an example of strategic communication and lays out the various arguments for and against expressing the security environment in GWOT terms. It shows that the ambiguity of the expression has created contention and has undermined the ongoing operational efforts. The chapter concludes with an evaluation of the effectiveness of the campaign to date. Chapter 3 rejects the primacy of terror as the objective of U.S. and coalition efforts and

re-focuses the spotlight on identifying the real enemy—al Qaeda—and its goals and objectives. Chapter 4 makes the case that al Qaeda is conducting a transnational, global insurgency and that this insurgency is the term that best describes the nature of the conflict. It further examines al Qaeda's development and success as an insurgent organization to date. The metrics used to make this assessment are based on criteria of well-established insurgency and counterinsurgency theorists. It concludes by presenting the concept that reframing the GWOT as a global counterinsurgency is the best approach to respond to al Qaeda's aspirations. Chapter 5 offers concluding observations and it offers as areas for further study identified gaps in current counterinsurgency (COIN) theory when viewed in a global context and cautions against viewing COIN theory as a panacea.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Colin S. Gray, "Irregular Enemies and the Essence of Strategy: Can the American Way of War Adapt?" *Strategic Studies Institute* (March 2006). <http://www.StrategicStudiesInstitute.army.mil/html> (accessed November 15, 2007), 7-12.

## Chapter 2— Global War on Terror: The Case for Inadequacy

### Strategic Communications

The description of the nature of the conflict as a Global War on Terror is by its nature a form of Strategic communications. Jeffery Jones, a former National Security Council member of the Bush administration and a retired U.S. Army colonel, states in an article for the *Joint Forces Quarterly* that Strategic communications is “the synchronized coordination of statecraft, public affairs, public diplomacy, military information operations, and other activities, reinforced by political, economic, military, and other actions, to advance U.S. foreign policy objectives.”<sup>9</sup> A successful strategic communication campaign must do more than just synchronize and coordinate diplomacy, messages, themes, and activities; it must understand the audience or target of these activities to be coordinated. Richard Halloran, a 20-year foreign and military correspondent for the *New York Times* and currently the Director of Communications and Journalism at the East-West Center and editorial director of the *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, writes,

Strategic communication begins with identifying the audience. In military terms, what are the targets? In most cases, that should be fairly easy—the government and public of an ally, the pro-American leaders in a neutral nation, the dissidents in a potential adversary, American citizens regardless of political party or geographic region whose support is essential. Some may be immediate believers, others may be dubious. All need to be addressed.<sup>10</sup>

The title GWOT certainly sent a message to every one of these audiences, but each received the message markedly different. The “immediate believers,” American citizens who accepted GWOT were pleased that the United States was willing to go on a war footing to avenge the 9-11 attacks. The pro-American leaders in neutral nations were satisfied that the U.S. placed the focus on terrorism, rather than al Qaeda. This was especially apparent in nations whose resident

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<sup>9</sup> Jeffery Jones, “Strategic Communications: a Mandate for the United States.” *Joint Forces Quarterly* issue 39 (4<sup>th</sup> Quarter, 2005), 108-109.

<sup>10</sup> Richard Halloran, “Strategic Communication.” *Parameters* vol. XXXVII, no. 3 (Autumn 2007), 7-8.

opposition groups tended to use terrorism as a tactic or who were the target of al Qaeda as well, such as Saudi Arabia. However, “dissidents” in these repression regimes probably felt threatened by this rhetoric. Also, American citizens, “dubious” of the Administration, were not as comfortable with the message of a war on terror fearing this broad description of the conflict could lead to unnecessary military entanglements. This view is reflected in a recent report on a memo that was circulated by the Democratic leadership of the House Armed Services Committee on 27 March 2007, to its staff to ban the use of GWOT in the 2008 defense budget. In his report, Rick Maze cites,

The ‘global war on terror,’ a phrase first used by President Bush shortly after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks on the U.S., should not be used, according to the memo. Also banned is the phrase the ‘long war,’ which military officials began using last year in a way of acknowledging that military operations against terrorist states and organizations would not be wrapped up in a few years.<sup>11</sup>

This ban exposes the hesitancy with which the opposition party regards GWOT.

In addition to the administration’s failure to convince its domestic opposition, it has also failed to win over many citizens and government officials of its allies. Famous British military historian, Michael Howard, illustrates the allied critique of the GWOT structure when he notes;

To declare war on terrorists or, even more illiterately, on terrorism is at once to accord terrorists a status and dignity that they seek and that they do not deserve. It confers on them a kind of legitimacy... But to use, or rather misuse, the term ‘war’ is not simply a matter of legality or pedantic semantics. It has deeper and more dangerous consequences. To declare that one is at war is immediately to create a war psychosis that may be totally counterproductive for the objective being sought. It arouses an immediate expectation, and demand, for spectacular military action against some easily identifiable adversary, preferably a hostile state—action leading to decisive results.<sup>12</sup>

It appears that Michael Howard is correct. Defining the current conflict as the Global War On Terror, or “War on Terror”, or “War against Global Terror”, or even the most recent description;

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<sup>11</sup> Rick Maze, “No More GWOT, House Committee Decrees”, *Army Times* (April 2007), [http://www.armytimes.com/news/2007/04/military\\_gwot\\_democrats\\_070403w/](http://www.armytimes.com/news/2007/04/military_gwot_democrats_070403w/), (Accessed 24 January 2008),1.

<sup>12</sup> Michael Howard, “What’s in a Name?: How to Fight Terrorism,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 81, No.1, (2002), 8.

the “Long War”, has clearly left the nation and the other agencies of national power believing that the government’s response to this threat is largely a military responsibility. The launching of Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom only served to reinforce this perception. The unfortunate use of the word “war” as the government’s policy and “terror” or “terrorism” as the enemy has hindered the administration’s ability to leverage the other instruments of national power.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, the primary factor contributing to the ineffectiveness of the administration’s domestic strategic communication efforts is the branding of the strategy as a global war focused on terrorism.

In fairness to the administration, their initial framing of the objective as stated in the 2002 NSS, as a “...war against terrorists of global reach,”<sup>14</sup> obviously was not meant to classify the situation as a global war on terrorism. Terrorists of global reach are significantly different from terrorists with a regional interest.<sup>15</sup> Unfortunately, the discipline of choosing words carefully was compromised when the description of the enemy changed from being terrorists with global reach or intentions to something more broadly defined. According to the NSS of 2002, “the enemy is not a single political regime or person or religion or ideology. The enemy is terrorism—premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against innocents.”<sup>16</sup> The broadening of the definition of the enemy by equating it to terrorism significantly clouded the focus of the nation’s efforts and confused many as to the understanding of the nature of the conflict. As Bard O’Neill, noted author, professor, and director of studies of insurgency and revolution at the National War College, Washington, D.C., notes about the construct of the GWOT, unintended

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> President of the United States. *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*. (Washington D.C.: September 2002), 5.

<sup>15</sup> For example, Hezbollah in Lebanon, Basque Separatists in Spain, or the Irish Republican Army in Northern Ireland are recognized terrorist organizations that have regional interest and are not a direct threat to US security.

consequences can occur by not differentiating between the aims of the enemy (in this case he calls them insurgents) and focusing solely on the tactics that they use:

It is worth pointing out that calculations about intervention that gloss over ultimate insurgent aims can lead to ill-informed and costly entanglements and the creation of enemies where none existed before. This is a particular danger within the current framework of the American Global War on Terrorism since the ultimate goals of many groups that rely on terrorism, either in whole or in part, may not threaten U.S. vital interest.<sup>17</sup>

One could make the case that Iraq is a prime example of what O'Neill calls "ill informed and costly entanglements." In fact, the administration admits in its 2006 NSS that Iraq is being used to recruit new soldiers into the enemy's camp when it stated that, "the ongoing fight in Iraq has been twisted by terrorist propaganda as a rallying cry."<sup>18</sup> Certainly, this is the belief of many in the anti-war movement. In order to analyze the continued practice of describing the nature of the conflict as a war on terror, the first task must be to understand why the administration chose to expand the definition from "terrorists of global reach" to simply terrorism.

## **What's in a Name?**

As stated earlier, the term Global War on Terrorism was successfully used by the administration as a rallying cry for the nation following the initial shock of the attacks on September 11, 2001. As Stein Tennesson, author, historian, and part-time Professor at the University of Oslo, notes about the President, "After September 11, he could focus U.S. national security on the image of the dangerous terrorist, and gather his nation, as well as most of the rest of the world, around his anti-terrorist campaign. He did it loudly, he did it as war, and he did it

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<sup>16</sup> President of the United States. *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*. (Washington D.C.: September 2002), 5.

<sup>17</sup> Bard E. O'Neill. *From Revolution to Apocalypse: Insurgency and Terrorism*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. revised, (Washington, D.C: Potomac Books, Inc., 2005), 32.

<sup>18</sup> President of the United States. *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*. (Washington D.C.: March 2006), 9.

with success, ...”<sup>19</sup> Unfortunately, as the shock of the attacks on 11 September wore off, the GWOT has come to mean many things to many people—creating the exact breakdown of unity the administration sought to avoid.

Immediately, the construct of GWOT was called into question from all corners of the political spectrum. For example, many Americans believe that the GWOT is synonymous with a war against al Qaeda. They contend that this expression was purposely designed to be indirect and ambiguous, i.e. politically correct, in order to mollify those critics who would seek to denigrate any action that was not directly connected to Osama Bin Laden and his organization. As Dr. Stephen Biddle, Associate Professor of National Security Studies at the U.S. Army War College Strategic Studies Institute argues, “Many suppose that the real enemy is al Qaeda, and that “terrorism” is little more than a rhetorical synonym for Osama bin Laden’s organization. Yet the administration has explicitly, and repeatedly, made clear that this is *not* their view.”<sup>20</sup> Ironically, it is this refusal to tie al Qaeda to the enemy that frustrates those with this view and gives the President more latitude to act in a myriad of cases.

Similarly, there are those that feel the true nature of Al Qaeda is Islamic extremism and that terrorism is their instrument to provoke a religious and cultural clash between Islam and the West. They believe that this clash should be the focus of the nation’s war efforts. William Kristol of the *Weekly Standard* expresses this viewpoint:

From Copenhagen to Samara, the radical Islamists are on the offensive. From Tehran to Damascus, the dictators are trying to regain the upper hand in the Middle East. From Moscow to Beijing, the enemies of liberal democracy are

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<sup>19</sup> Stein Temnessonl. “War On Terrorism: A Global Civil War?” *For the IPRA Conference* (July2002). <http://www.sum.uio.no/staff/stonness/stonness.html>, (accessed August 15, 2007), 5. The emotions of the events unified the nation and the world behind the President. However, the administration knew that over time this unity could break down. Therefore, constructing a strategy to satisfy the many views regarding the threat led to calling the campaign a global war on terrorism.

<sup>20</sup> Stephen D. Biddle, “American Grand Strategy After 9/11: An Assessment,” *Strategic Studies Institute* (March 2006). <http://www.carlisle.army.mil/ssi> (accessed August 15, 2007), 6.



working to weaken the United States. Across the world, the forces of terror and tyranny are fighting back. Are we up to the challenge?

It's not clear that we are. Many liberals... long ago lost their nerve to wage war...Parts of the conservative movement now seem to be losing their nerve as well. In response to an apparent clash of civilizations, they would retrench, hunker down, and let large parts of the world go to hell in a hand basket, hoping that the hand basket won't blow up in our faces.<sup>21</sup>

This group largely believes that the administration chose the expression GWOT for diplomatic expediency as an attempt to avoid the perception of linking together Islam, terrorism, and extremism. They also believe by ignoring the true nature of the enemy the administration is “hunkering down” instead of waging the necessary fight. However, the administration argues that by engaging in a “clash of civilizations” the United States and her allies would be playing into what the enemy wants to provoke, “The GWOT is a war to preserve ordinary peoples’ ability to live as they choose, and to protect the tolerance and moderation of free and open societies. It is not a religious or cultural clash between Islam and the West, although our extremist enemies find it useful to characterize the war that way.”<sup>22</sup> Also, this characterization of the conflict neglects other threats to the United States’ interest and security and ignores competitors that could challenge its legitimacy as world leader by exploiting a perceived overreaction by the United States. Despite the administrations overtures to the contrary, this perception, that the administration is “hunkering down” and losing their “nerve” to fight the necessary war, still persists among many Americans today.

Others, particularly those who oppose many aspects of the Patriot Act or who question the reasons for the invasion of Iraq as insufficient, believe the GWOT was an expression made to be deliberately ambiguous. They contend that it allowed the administration to use its power wherever it wanted as long as it could show a link to the greater GWOT. As Phil Scranton,

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<sup>21</sup> William Kristol, “The Long War: Radical Islamists are on the Offensive. Will We Defeat Them?” *The Weekly Standard*, Vol. 11, no. 24 (March 2006), 9.

<sup>22</sup> Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. *National Military Strategic Plan for the War on Terrorism* (Washington, D.C: February 1, 2006), 4.

Professor of Criminology and Director of the Centre for Studies in Crime and Social Justice, Edge Hill University College, UK, argues:

Terrorism thus provides a pretext for spying on, harassing, incarcerating and even killing people engaged in doing things that many take for granted as rights available to citizens in a democracy... measures initially justified on the need to counter-terrorism are progressively normalized and integrated into everyday policing and security operations.<sup>23</sup>

Individuals who agree with this argument assert that the ambiguity of the phrase GWOT, coupled with universal rejection of terrorism, gave the reactionary and pro-military forces within the administration a stronger position of shaping the direction of American foreign policy. According to Richard Falk, Milbank Professor Emeritus of International Law at Princeton University, “Advocates of an even more militarist approach by the US government to Middle Eastern politics took full advantage of the anti-terrorist mobilization to press their case on quite unrelated issues such as regime change in Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and even Iran.”<sup>24</sup> Unfortunately, as time and distance fade the memory of the tragic events of 9-11, this cynical argument has gained more and more acceptance in the mainstream of American public opinion.

In the face of these criticisms, the administration and its supporters make a convincing case to the on-going debate by arguing that the GWOT, as a concept, grew out of an initial attempt to articulate a strategy that allowed the United States sufficient freedom of action to fight an elusive enemy. As Steven Biddle suggests, the administration made a conscious decision to broaden the definition of the enemy to provide it greater strategic flexibility as more information regarding the threat materialized:

Casting the net broadly makes it less likely that our war effort will inadvertently exclude important allies of al Qaeda whose connection to bin Laden was ambiguous or unknown to us. The broader the definition of the enemy, the lower

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<sup>23</sup> Phil Scranton, ed. *Beyond September 11: An Anthology of Dissent*, (London, UK and Sterling, Virginia, USA: Pluto Press, 2002), 56.

<sup>24</sup> Richard Falk, *The Great Terror War*, (Brooklyn, New York and Northampton, Massachusetts: Olive Branch Press, 2003), 3. Bob Woodward, a thirty-two year veteran of the *Washington Post*, makes similar claims in his *Bush at War* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 2002), p. 93-107.

is the risk of excluding a real threat in an inherently murky domain. A broad definition could in principle create common cause with American allies facing terror threats of their own ... And, of course, a broad definition of the enemy is rhetorically helpful: a war ostensibly against terrorism at large affords a moral clarity and normative power that helps marshal public support for the war effort.<sup>25</sup>

Therefore, this monograph concedes that the GWOT as a description of the conflict during the confusing initial phase of this new struggle was acceptable as a temporary solution. However, this overly simplistic branding and militaristic approach has become less acceptable to the American public over time and has led many to question its usefulness as a representation of the security environment as it exists today. Unfortunately Iraq, with its tenuous links to 9-11, has become the face of the GWOT and the catalyst for the skepticism surrounding the administration's position. Additionally, the onset of a complex insurgency in Iraq only fuels this skepticism and causes the idea of "terror" as the enemy seem absurd. Steven Biddle states that the way the administration has fielded these questions has been ineffective and left many with lingering doubts and misgivings:

...The Government's answers to these questions have combined ambitious public statements with vague particulars as to the scope of the threat and the end state to be sought. This combination of ambition and ambiguity creates important but unresolved tensions in American strategy. If the costs are low enough, these tensions are tolerable: the United States can avoid making hard choices and instead pursue ill-defined goals with limited penalties. But the higher the cost, the harder this becomes. And the costs are rising rapidly with the ongoing insurgency in Iraq. Eventually something will have to give—the ambiguity in today's grand strategy is fast becoming intolerable.<sup>26</sup>

Regardless of these misgivings and given the unknown and developing situation, reasonable individuals can acknowledge the logic in defining the security environment so broadly.

Nevertheless, after six years of conflict, the lack of a tangible definition of the threat is starting to have an adverse effect on the sustainability of the effort required for success. This lack of focus

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<sup>25</sup> Stephen D. Biddle, "American Grand Strategy After 9/11: An Assessment." *Strategic Studies Institute* (March 2006). <http://www.carlisle.army.mil/ssi> (accessed August 15, 2007), 7-8.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

has been the most prominent failure of the strategic communications campaign designed for domestic and allied consumption.<sup>27</sup> Now that the context for the structure of the current threat model has been established, it is necessary to assess the efficacy of the GWOT to date.

### **The Current Score Card: Where Does the GWOT Stand Today?**

Certainly, a compelling argument can be made that the successful execution of the portion of the NSS under the description of GWOT has been evident on many levels. As Frank Hoffman, a non-resident senior fellow of Foreign Policy Research Institute and former Pentagon analyst points out, “Viewed, objectively U.S. policy has garnered some positive achievements. For example:”

The U.S. has recovered from a deadly attack on our own shores with two swift military campaigns. Saddam Hussein is no longer terrorizing his people and threatening the region.

Despite what you might read, there has been progress in governance and economic development in both Afghanistan and Iraq...

We are working effectively in partnership with key allies—not just Britain and Australia—but thirty odd nations.

The nation has begun to shore up our home defenses, although clearly the stand up of DHS is still a work in progress—reorganizing in the midst of war is never easy.

Likewise, we’ve reorganized our intelligence system, although we’re still not sure if competition between OSD and the new Director of National Intelligence create more opportunities for our enemies than it retards.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> As contentious and polarizing as this period has been, there are probably other theories for the naming of this conflict that could be added to this list. However, the three arguments stated above and summarized here are the ones most commonly involved in the current debate: 1) that GWOT was a diplomatic and discreet way of avoiding calling the war a war against Al Qaeda and Islamic extremism, or a clash of civilizations; 2) that GWOT was purposely vague to give the administration a “blank check” for what would otherwise be unacceptable policies or actions, or 3) that GWOT was intentionally left ambiguous and open enough to allow greater strategic flexibility as the true form of the threat took shape over time. Without disparaging the merits of each of these arguments, this monograph (con’t on next page) will concede the explanations and assertions made by the administration as to the reasons behind the construct of the GWOT.

<sup>28</sup> Frank Hoffman, “Assessing the Long War,” Foreign Policy Research Institute, *enotes*, (4 January 2007), <http://www.fpri.org>, (accessed 20 November, 2007), 2.

Hoffman contends that most of the progress to date can be attributed to organizational initiatives that were recognized as necessary updates to an outdated Cold War architecture. That being said, these successes are also reflective of the implementation of the GWOT as part of the larger NSS.

Despite these successes, there are many indicators that the strategy has not been completely triumphant. For example, as of this month there have been over 4000 U.S. combat deaths in Iraq alone with a continuing casualty rate occurring in the still on-going military campaigns in both Afghanistan and Iraq. Furthermore, the elusiveness of the top tier of al Qaeda's leadership, i.e. Osama bin Laden and his chief ally, Ayman al Zawahiri, remain a frustrating reality. Additionally, strained international relations among key allies in the GWOT continue to hamper global efforts. Other key issues include: a resurgent Taliban resistance, a weakening Pakistan, the potentiality of a nuclear Iran, and a growing dissatisfaction of the current strategy by the American people. Regardless, most of these setbacks can be recognized as the cost of doing business in war. The inherent complexity of war demands that things will not always go as planned. As Clausewitz declares:

Every thing in war is very simple, but the simplest thing is difficult. The difficulties accumulate and end by producing a kind of friction that is inconceivable unless one has experienced war... Countless minor incidents—the kind you can never really foresee—combine to lower the general level of performance, so that one always falls short of the intended goal.<sup>29</sup>

However successful or unsuccessful the strategy may be, it is ultimately the loss of confidence of the American public, loss of credibility of U.S. foreign policy, and increased strained relations of key allies that endangers the nation's efforts in this protracted struggle. If these chinks in the policy's armor are not resolved, the will to carry on the fight could wane and ultimately lead to defeat. Describing the conflict as a GWOT has in the end undermined the good intentions of the administration efforts. For these reasons alone, GWOT can be seen as a flawed construct. It is

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<sup>29</sup> Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. and ed. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (New Jersey: Princeton University Press. 1989), 119.

flawed as a contradictory piece of strategic communication by its use of both assertive and ambiguous language. GWOT is an assertive proclamation of war yet ambiguous regarding the enemy. As a result of this assertiveness, the U.S. has found itself involved in two different regional conflicts with real enemies. The ambiguity of a war on terror and its broad definition of the enemy no longer serve the strategy. The challenge today is how best to reframe the conflict to accurately capture its fundamental nature—a necessary process if one is to effectively meet its challenges. The first step in that process is to replace the primacy of terror with a re-focus on identifying the real enemy and its objectives.

## Chapter 3—The Nature of the Threat

### The Enemy and Its Goals?

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, the current depiction of the conflict as a GWOT erroneously specifies the enemy as the wide-ranging phenomena called terrorism. Obviously, terrorism and terrorists play a vital role in accurately describing today's threat environment. Yet, in order to understand its role it is necessary to first define the term to determine its relevance within the strategy. According to the National Military Strategic Plan for the War on Terrorism in 2006, "Terrorism is the calculated use of unlawful violence or the threat of unlawful violence to inculcate fear; intended to coerce or to intimidate governments or societies in the pursuit of goals that are generally political, religious, or ideological. The term 'terrorist' refers to those who conduct terrorist acts."<sup>30</sup> The plan further explains that, "the primary enemy is a transnational movement of extremist organizations, networks, and individuals—and their state and non-state supporters—which have in common that they exploit Islam and use terrorism for ideological ends."<sup>31</sup> Bard E. O'Neill defines terrorism as "the threat or use of physical coercion, primarily against noncombatants, especially civilians, to create fear in order to achieve various political objectives."<sup>32</sup> Clearly, each of these definitions underscores terrorism as a "means" to an end—a tactic to be used to gain an objective or goal. Stephen Biddle reinforces this point when he comments:

Terrorism, after all, is a tactic, not an enemy. Taken literally, a 'war on terrorism' is closer to a 'war on strategic bombing' or a 'war on amphibious assault' than it is to orthodox war aims or wartime grand strategies; one normally makes war on

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<sup>30</sup> Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. *National Military Strategic Plan for the War on Terrorism* (Washington, D.C: February 1, 2006), 37.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>32</sup> Bard E. O'Neill. *From Revolution to Apocalypse: Insurgency and Terrorism*, 2nd ed. revised, (Washington, D.C: Potomac Books, Inc., 2005), 33.

an enemy, not a method. Nor can one simply assume that anyone who uses terrorist tactics is to be the target of American war making.<sup>33</sup>

Therefore, terrorism cannot be an enemy, rather a tactic used by the enemy to achieve its goals.

If the war efforts of the United States have so far focused on terrorism, then the conclusion can be drawn that the strategy has been misdirected. Philip Gordon, Senior Fellow for U.S. Foreign Policy at the Brookings Institution, reasons that,

Victory in the war on terror will not mean the end of terrorism, the end of tyranny, or the end of evil... Terrorism, after all (to say nothing of tyranny or evil), has been around for a long time and will never go away entirely...the goal of ending terrorism entirely is not only unrealistic but also counterproductive—just as the pursuit of other utopian goals.<sup>34</sup>

Considering the mounting costs of the strategy, as well as, the resource constrained strategic environment, the GWOT's misdirected focus on terrorism can no longer be tolerated and a clear definition of the enemy must be made. If terrorism is not the enemy, then who or what is?

## **The Enemy Defined—Al Qaeda**

In war, clearly identifying the enemy is essential to ensure victory. As the great warrior philosopher Sun Tzu proclaimed in his *Art of War*:

Thus it is said that one who knows the enemy and knows himself will not be endangered in a hundred engagements. One who does not know the enemy but knows himself will sometimes be victorious, sometimes meet with defeat. One who knows neither the enemy nor himself will invariably be defeated in every engagement.<sup>35</sup>

As this largely accepted principle of war implies, not knowing the enemy may lead to defeat.

Therefore, to ensure victory one must know their enemy. To find the answer to the question—who is the enemy in today's fight?—one needs to remember who was responsible for the acts of September 11th. Regarding the identity of the enemy when one considers the previous attacks on

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<sup>33</sup> Stephen D. Biddle, "American Grand Strategy After 9/11: An Assessment." *Strategic Studies Institute* (March 2006). <http://www.carlisle.army.mil/ssi> (accessed August 15, 2007), 6.

<sup>34</sup> Philip H. Gordon, "Can the War on Terror Be Won? How to Fight the Right War," *Foreign Affairs* Vol. 86, no. 6 (November/December 2007), 59.

<sup>35</sup> Sun Tzu, *Art of War*, Trans. by Ralph D. Sawyer, (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994), 179.



America as well as the acts of terror on her allies since September 11th, the answer is clear – al Qaeda. In addition to the terror attacks of 9-11, al Qaeda was responsible for the bombings of the Kobar Towers in Saudi Arabia in 1996, the American embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998, and the 2000 attack on the USS Cole in Yemen. Proving that al Qaeda is not just a threat to U. S. security, that organization has carried out attacks on others, such as, the island nation of Bali, the Madrid railway bombing in Spain, and the London subway and bus bombings in Great Britain. As noted earlier, if the object of defining the enemy as terrorism vice al Qaeda was to ensure that potential allies of al Qaeda were not inadvertently excluded from the strategies objectives, then the events of the intervening years have visibly demonstrated that the enemy is still al Qaeda.<sup>36</sup>

## **What Is al Qaeda?**

Declaring al Qaeda the enemy has many benefits. Most importantly, it provides a means to assess its strengths and weakness for strategy development in order to undermine its strengths and exploit its weaknesses. Al Qaeda's strength derives from two elements: anonymity and dispersion. For a demonstration of al Qaeda's global reach and its operational capabilities, one

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<sup>36</sup> Even under the construct of GWOT, the administration acknowledged that al Qaeda was the most dangerous threat facing the nation. Statements from the 2006 National Strategic Military Plan allude that there is "no monolithic enemy network with a single set of goals and objectives," rather, the threat is more complicated than that; however, the plan does recognize that "the al Qa'ida Associated Movement (AQAM), comprised of al Qa'ida and affiliated extremists, is the most dangerous present manifestation of such extremism." (Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. National Military Strategic Plan for the War on Terror, p 13) Still, as early as the 2002 NSS, the document accepted that threat came from global terrorist organizations. As a result, the 2002 NSS announced, "Our priority will be first to disrupt and destroy terrorist organizations of global reach and attack their leadership; command, control, and communications; material support; and finances." (President of the United States. The National Security Strategy of the United States of America, p. 5). The strategy further identifies al Qaeda as a center of concern and includes its allies by claiming that, "Our immediate focus will be those terrorist organizations of global reach and any terrorist or state sponsor of terrorism which attempts to gain or use weapons of mass destruction (WMD) or their precursors..." (President of the United States. The National Security Strategy of the United States of America, p. 5). The warning to those who would use or attempt to use weapons of mass destruction is the implication of Iraq as an indirect target of the strategy. The assumption is that states with access to WMD would cooperate with global terrorists. Again, the focal point comes back to global terrorists. Thus, the administration would find few domestic or international critics if it were to openly

need only to look at the terrorist network's operations over the last decade. Its attacks demonstrate the organization's ability to strike across the globe at a time and place of their own choosing. Even though Al Qaeda as an organization is well known, due to the promotion gained through their operational successes and their impressive information operations, the actual physical structure of the organization is still shrouded in obscurity, which has created their desired anonymity. Other than the few key leaders at the top, Osama Bin Laden and Ayman al Zawahiri, little is certain about the structure, membership, and location of the organization. Richard Falk notes that Al Qaeda achieves its desired dispersion by being a far-flung network with "operating capabilities in many countries, estimated to be anywhere between 40 and possibly as many as 80."<sup>37</sup> These operating capabilities are resident in structures called cells. In fact, Falk also observes that, "al Qaeda exemplified the organizational form of the current era of globalization: a network that could operate anywhere and everywhere, and yet was definitively situated nowhere."<sup>38</sup> Again, this dispersion and lack of certainty provide the anonymity necessary for the network to avoid systematic destruction.

Despite al Qaeda's success at remaining largely anonymous and discrete, the United States and her allies are beginning to learn more about the organization's structure and functions. As noted earlier, regarding leadership, it is widely known that the founding fathers of al Qaeda are Osama bin Laden and Ayman al Zawahiri, who first met and developed the contemporary

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declare al Qaeda and its allies as the enemy they intend to confront.

<sup>37</sup> Richard Falk, *The Great Terror War*, (Brooklyn, New York and Northampton, Massachusetts: Olive Branch Press, 2003), 7.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

stage of revolutionary Salafist<sup>39</sup> doctrine and strategy during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan from 1979 to 1989.<sup>40</sup> These two charismatic leaders met in Peshawar, Pakistan, during the guerilla campaign against the Soviets. As Christopher Henzel, Foreign Service officer and a 2004 graduate of the National War College comments, “the two collaborated closely, Zawahiri contributing his skills as an ideologist, Bin Laden his organizational talents and financial resources. The two publicly announced the merger of their groups in 1998, completing al Qaeda’s development into the group that challenges the United States today.”<sup>41</sup> In addition to the organizational founding and leadership make-up, al Qaeda is also known to be a wide-ranging, fundamentally cellular organization that stresses family associations and focuses on supporting and conducting military operations.<sup>42</sup> Shawn Brimley, Research Associate at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, D.C notes that al Qaeda,

Survives by grafting itself onto existing networks that are older and have enjoyed a long history of success. By using gang, drug, prison, money laundering, and smuggling networks to facilitate everything from recruitment to financing, material procurement, and operational support, al Qaeda is able to sustain a horizontal network structure in the absence of a convenient state sanctuary.<sup>43</sup>

In addition to using these older, established networks and emphasis on family connections, the network also consists of a “central structure led by the emir-general (bin Laden), a consultative

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<sup>39</sup> Trevor Stanley, “Understanding the Origins of Wahhabism and Salafism,” *Terrorism Monitor*, Vol. 3, no. 4 (July 15, 2005) *Global Terrorism Analysis*, published by the Jamestown Foundation <http://www.jamestown.org/terrorism/index.php> (Accessed 3 May 2008). Trevor Stanley notes, “Salafism originated in the mid to late 19th Century, as an intellectual movement at al-Azhar University, led by Muhammad Abduh (1849-1905), Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1839-1897) and Rashid Rida (1865-1935). The movement was built on a broad foundation. Al-Afghani was a political activist, whereas Abduh, an educator, sought gradual social reform (as a part of da’wa), particularly through education. Debate over the place of these respective methods of political change continues to this day in Salafi groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood.”

<sup>40</sup> Christopher Henzel, “Origins of al Qaeda Ideology: Implications for U.S. Strategy” *Parameters* Vol. XXXV, no. 1 (Spring 2005), 75-76.

<sup>41</sup> Christopher Henzel, “Origins of al Qaeda Ideology: Implications for U.S. Strategy” *Parameters* Vol. XXXV, no. 1 (Spring 2005), 75-76.

<sup>42</sup> Bard E. O’Neill, *Insurgency & Terrorism: From Revolution to Apocalypse*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. (Washington, D.C: Potomac Books, Inc., 2005), 120

council (*majlis al-shura*) made up of key elites appointed by bin Laden, and four operational committees responsible for various functions: the military, finance and business, fatwa and Islamic study, and media and publicity.”<sup>44</sup> These functional committees and the associated leadership structure make up what Bard O’Neill refers to as the inner core. O’Neill notes that,

The inner core plans and directs guerilla and terrorists attacks of its own and in this sense is somewhat akin to the regular forces in the Maoist format, Through ‘connectors,’ it also coordinates with, inspires, and sometimes instigates attacks by independent—but like minded—outer core groups across the globe, some of which have closer ties with Al Qaida than others (e.g., Jamaa al-Isamiyya in Southeast Asia).<sup>45</sup>

As implied in the statement above, al Qaeda is both an organization and a movement.

Understanding its motivation, how it’s organized, and how it operates provides an invaluable insight into its strengths and more importantly, its vulnerabilities.

## **The Goals of al Qaeda**

Once the enemy’s strengths and weakness are known and its organizational structure is evident, the next step would be to determine its strategic goals and operational objectives. So what are al Qaeda’s goals? According to Stein Temnessonl, al Qaeda’s, “...first goal is to liberate

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<sup>43</sup> Shawn Brimley, “Tentacles of Jihad: Targeting Transnational Support Networks,” *Parameters* Vol. XXXVI (Summer 2006), 33

<sup>44</sup> Bard E. O’Neill, *Insurgency & Terrorism: From Revolution to Apocalypse*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. (Washington, D.C: Potomac Books, Inc., 2005), 74-107, 120-121. Each of these committees’ functions has distinct roles within the network. For instance, the military committee is responsible for recruiting, training, and procuring transportation, and launching operations. Also, it is in charge of tasking teams to plan and execute attacks, allocate the necessary resources for those attacks, conduct feasibility studies for new weapons and technologies to include WMD, and to manage the extensive network of cells and the internal security apparatus of al Qaeda. The finance and business committee manages the financial resources to sustain the organization and is responsible for maintaining a network of bank relations to facilitate the global movement of monies. Also it supervises a special office for procuring passports and other entry documents. The *fatwa* and Islamic Study committee creates the ideological materials necessary for indoctrination of new recruits, attends to the spiritual guidance for the movement, and issues *fatwa* to justify al Qaeda operations. Finally, the media and publicity committee is largely the propaganda machine for the organization. Its duties include disseminating al Qaeda news and information regarding political and military operations, publishing the Arabic daily, *Nashrat al-akhbar*, and developing weekly reports.

<sup>45</sup> Bard E. O’Neill, *Insurgency & Terrorism: From Revolution to Apocalypse*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. (Washington, D.C: Potomac Books, Inc., 2005), 121.

Islam's holy places—Mecca and Medina—and force the withdrawal of all U.S. occupation forces from the Arabian Peninsula.”<sup>46</sup> The establishment of those “occupational” forces in Saudi Arabia was a result of the end of Operation Desert Storm in 1991.<sup>47</sup> However, it is not just the U.S. presence with which al Qaeda has issue; it considers the Royal Saudi Family to be apostate for allowing the infidel U.S. presence on the soil of the Holy Land. As Temnessonl points out, “The shame of bearing witness to how the armies of the infidels garrison the core region of the Prophet seems to have been the main motivating force for Osama bin Laden’s break with the Saudi regime in the early 1990s.”<sup>48</sup> Again, according to Philip Gordon, “Bin Laden’s goal, as he, his deputy, Ayman al-Zawahiri, and others have often articulated, is to drive the United States out of Muslim lands, topple the region’s current rulers, and establish Islamic authority under a new caliphate. The path to this goal is clear, to ‘provoke and bait’ the United States into ‘bleeding wars’ on Muslim lands.”<sup>49</sup> Needless, to say, al Qaeda is indignant that U.S. forces now occupy Iraq, in general, and Baghdad, in particular, as both are seen as important places of Islamic heritage and culture.

If the removal of U.S. occupational forces and their supporting apostate regimes from the Holy Lands is an operational objective of al Qaeda, it is important also to fully understand its strategic goal. Christopher Henzel, in paraphrasing Ayman al Zawahiri from his 2001 book, *Knights Under the Prophet’s Banner*, confirms al Qaeda’s short-term goals, of what Zawahiri

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<sup>46</sup>Stein Temnessonl. “War On Terrorism: A Global Civil War?” *For the IPRA Conference* (July2002). <http://www.sum.uio.no/staff/stonness/stonness.html>, (accessed August 15, 2007), 3.

<sup>47</sup> Since the mainly U.S. led multi-national coalition signed on only for the liberation of Kuwait and not the invasion and overthrow of Iraq, large U.S. land and air bases were set up in Saudi Arabia to deter and contain the Saddam Hussein regime from future threats to his neighbors.

<sup>48</sup> Stein Temnessonl. “War On Terrorism: A Global Civil War?” *For the IPRA Conference* (July2002). <http://www.sum.uio.no/staff/stonness/stonness.html>, (accessed August 15, 2007), 3. Even more incongruous, is the fact that the subsequent removal of the Saddam Hussein Regime through Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003 enabled the removal of those forces from Saudi Arabia that bin Laden so deeply resented.

<sup>49</sup> Philip H. Gordon, “Can the War on Terror Be Won?: How to Fight the Right War;” *Foreign Affairs* Vol. 86, no. 6 (November/December 2007), 57.

calls, "... the revolutionary fundamentalist movement': first, achievement of ideological coherence and organization, then struggle against the existing regimes of the Muslim world, followed by the establishment of a 'genuinely' Muslim state "at the heart of Arab world."<sup>50</sup> Al Qaeda can convincingly argue that it has already achieved ideological coherence and organization and is now carrying on the struggle against the existing Muslim regimes. However, an intermediate goal is uncovered—the establishment of a "genuinely" Muslim state in the "heart of the Arab world." The instability created by U.S. operations in both Afghanistan and Iraq make both of these countries attractive to al Qaeda as potential solutions to this intermediate goal. Therefore, in order to thwart al Qaeda's desires, U.S. and coalition success in these campaigns is essential to prevent the establishment of this "genuinely" Muslim state in the "heart of the Arab world."

However, al Qaeda has even greater aspirations than just the establishment of a "genuinely" Muslim state. According to Bard O'Neill, "Al Qaida and its affiliates indicated their desire to establish a worldwide Islamic political system, or caliphate, in which everyone would accept, or be compelled to accept, Islamic rule: they thereby posed a truly revolutionary threat with in the context of the international system."<sup>51</sup> Stein Temnessonl reinforces this long-term goal for al Qaeda:

In terms of ideology, they are attached to the past: they want to revive the Caliphate. Their unrealistic hopes seem based on the assumption that a sudden Islamic revival could occur in today's world in the same way that the faith spread from the Arabian peninsula to North Africa, Southeast Europe, Central, South, and Southeast Asia in centuries long past.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Christopher Henzel, "Origins of Al Qaeda Ideology: Implications for U.S. Strategy," *Parameters* Vol. XXXV, no. 1 (Spring 2005), 76.

<sup>51</sup> Bard E. O'Neill, *Insurgency & Terrorism: From Revolution to Apocalypse*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. (Washington, D.C: Potomac Books, Inc., 2005), 22.

<sup>52</sup> Stein Temnessonl. "War On Terrorism: A Global Civil War?" *For the IPRA Conference* (July 2002). <http://www.sum.uio.no/staff/stonness/stonness.html>, (accessed August 15, 2007), 7.

Notwithstanding Temnessonl's characterization of these hopes as unrealistic, al Qaeda has unmistakably articulated its hopes, goals, and priorities as an organization.

Other than removing the U.S. presence from the "Holy Lands", how do these goals impact the United States? As maintained by the United States government in the 2006 National Security Strategy, the impact of the terrorists' goals "is to overthrow a rising democracy; claim a strategic country as a haven for terror; destabilize the Middle East; and strike America and other free nations with ever-increasing violence."<sup>53</sup> Apparently, the ultimate objective of al Qaeda is to establish a "safe haven" from which to strike at the United States. In light of the evidence, this appears to be an unsophisticated view. Additionally, categorizing the terrorist actions of al Qaeda as merely a means to an end that offers little more than the same—continued terrorist actions—is also shortsighted. However, linking the means of terror to an end that equals more terrorists' attacks certainly fits the construct of the GWOT, where terrorism has primacy. But, if al Qaeda's strategy is scrutinized more closely, a different agenda and cultural construct emerge.

Surely, attacks on the West and the United States in particular must serve their purpose, but how? The ideological viewpoint, in which Islam's greatest peril is a deadly combination of apostate secularism coupled with the damaging cultural influences of the West, continues to be a core belief of the Salifist movement.<sup>54</sup> For example, Muhammad Abd al-Salam Faraj, an electrician and self-taught theologian for the underground Jihad in Egypt during the 1970's and convicted as a leader in the conspiracy of the assassination of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat in 1981, composed his manifesto, *The Neglected Duty*. It served to spread Qutb's message and

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<sup>53</sup> President of the United States. *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*. (Washington D.C.: September 2002), 12.

<sup>54</sup> Christopher Henzel, "Origins of Al Qaeda Ideology: Implications for U.S. Strategy," *Parameters* Vol. XXXV, no. 1 (Spring 2005), 73-74.

updated his strategy.<sup>55</sup> It reflected the strategy that is essentially used by al Qaeda today. The strategy advocates, “attack the ‘near enemy’—apostate Muslim regimes—before the ‘far enemy’—meaning Israel, the United States, and other Western powers interfering in the Muslim world.”<sup>56</sup> Therefore, it can be deduced that the purpose of attacking the United States and the West is to provoke the West into overreacting by militarily interfering in the Muslim world. This Western meddling can then be used to foment an Islamic Jihad to oppose it. Then once generated the Jihad can then be used to turn against the apostate regimes of the region that are supported by the West. Again, Henzel makes this argument when he states:

Zawahiri sees high-profile terrorist strikes against the external enemy as a means of making propaganda for the Muslim masses. He calls on his followers, at this stage of the struggle, to “launch a battle for orienting the [Muslim] nation” by striking at the United States and Israel. Thus, al Qaeda’s immediate goal is not to destroy Israel or even drive the United States out of the Middle East; rather, it is to “orient the nation.”<sup>57</sup>

Consequently, attacks on the United States and the West, as Zawahiri articulates, is to “orient” the Muslim “nation” and once oriented they will see the apostate regime for what they are and the masses will then remove them from authority.

## Summary

This chapter has briefly examined the GWOT as a descriptor of conflict the nation found itself in after September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001. It has argued that the GWOT served an important and necessary function in this new conflict to help the nation unite during anxious and uncertain

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<sup>55</sup> If one examines the ideological roots of al Qaeda, the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood, Hassan Al-Banna (1906-1949) and Sayyed Qutb (1906-1966), a later flag bearer for the Salifist movement and member of the Muslim Brotherhood, both warned against secularism and the influences of the West. Al-Banna, “sought to unite and mobilize Muslims against the cultural and political domination of the West,” whereas, Qutb warned against western influences within the Muslim world during the post colonial shake-up of the Middle East at the end of World War II and at the start of the ideological bi-polarization of the world during the Cold War.

<sup>56</sup> Christopher Henzel, “Origins of Al Qaeda Ideology: Implications for U.S. Strategy,” *Parameters* Vol. XXXV, no. 1 (Spring 2005), 74-75.



times. Although an important first step, the concept of a ‘war on terror’ ultimately unravels under scrutiny. This chapter proves this point. The end result of the administration’s failure to address this flaw sooner resulted in a loss of credibility for the administration both at home and abroad. Furthermore, it resulted in a loss of unity that the nation and the international community once experienced, particularly in the aftermath of September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001. This loss of credibility and unity as well as permitting suspicion and political partisanship to fuel the debate, ultimately is responsible for jeopardizing the strategy. Therefore, the chapter concludes by refocusing the strategy to more clearly identify the enemy, describe how it is organized, and examine its goals (ends). In the process of examining these ends, an insight into the enemy’s strategy (ways and means) emerges. Chapter 4 will build upon these insights, making a case that al Qaeda is conducting a transnational global insurgency as the means to its ends. Ultimately, a counter strategy that acknowledges the true nature of the conflict by accounting for the enemy and its strategies and goals is one that has the greatest chance of being effective.

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 69-80.

## **Chapter 4—The Nature of the Conflict (The Case for Global Insurgency and Counterinsurgency)**

### **Introduction**

The previous chapter provided a clear identification of the enemy, examined its structure as an organization, and provide a description of its objectives, goals, and strategies (ends). This chapter will investigate the nature of the conflict from the enemy's perspective to capture the essence of the struggle. It will examine the methods (the ways and means) that this enemy is using to achieve its ends. Clearly, these methods are asymmetric in nature and rely heavily on terrorism. However, the argument will be made that the enemy is, in the end conducting, a form of insurgency. In order to make this argument, formulating a working definition of insurgency is necessary, and comparing this definition to the actions of al Qaeda will establish that it meets the definition. It is also imperative to determine the type of insurgency that best describes al Qaeda, conduct an evaluation of al Qaeda's success to date, and use criteria from insurgency theory to conclude the current status of al Qaeda's strategy. The investigation will rely heavily on an analysis of insurgency theory from many perspectives to include historians, political analysts, scholars, military theorists, and military practitioners.

According to Bard O'Neill, terrorism and insurgency are closely linked, in fact he states, "...to understand most terrorism we must first understand insurgency."<sup>58</sup> If one accepts the premise that Al Qaeda is waging an insurgency on a global scale then it is necessary to define insurgency. It is difficult to sort out the various definitions of the actions that apply when describing the type of warfare that al Qaeda is conducting. Thus, the challenge is one of terminology. In researching this topic, terms such as unconventional, irregular, revolutionary, asymmetric, 4<sup>th</sup> generation, insurrection, guerilla, terrorism, insurgency, etc, have been used

interchangeably by many authors and most have acknowledged the inconsistencies in terminology for this field of study. However, despite these inconsistencies, there exists enough commonality in definitions to allow for a useful interpretation of the terminology. In this study, the term insurgency is the preferred expression to describe al Qaeda's methods. Therefore, it is imperative that a working definition of insurgency be established.

## Insurgency Defined

Bard O'Neill defines insurgency as, "a struggle between a non-ruling group and the ruling authorities in which the non-ruling group consciously uses political resources (e.g. organizational expertise, propaganda, and demonstrations) and violence to destroy, reformulate, or sustain the basis for legitimacy of one or more aspects of politics."<sup>59</sup> While, according to David Galula, the father of counterinsurgency theory, insurgency is, "a protracted struggle conducted methodically, step by step, in order to attain specific intermediate objectives leading finally to the overthrow of the existing order."<sup>60</sup> Anthony James Jones, author and professor at St. Joseph's University, equates insurgency with guerilla warfare. He states that, "insurgency, an attempt to overthrow or oppose a state or regime by force of arms, very often takes the form of guerilla war. That happens because guerilla war is the weapon of the weak. It is waged by those whose inferiority in numbers, equipment, and financial resources makes it impossible to meet their opponents in open, conventional battle."<sup>61</sup> He further explains that guerrilla insurgency or warfare is, "a method employed by those seeking to force a militarily superior opponent to accept

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<sup>58</sup> Bard O'Neill, *Insurgency and Terrorism: From Revolution to Apocalypse*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed, (Washington DC: Potomac Books Inc, 2005), 2

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>60</sup> David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*. Revised Ed. (United States of America: Hailer Publishing, 2005), 4.

<sup>61</sup> Anthony J. Joes, *Resisting Rebellion: the History and Politics of Counterinsurgency*. (Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 2004), 1.

their political objectives.”<sup>62</sup> Additionally, he argues that guerrillas or insurgents are sustained by the support of the people, high morale, a capable intelligence network, secure bases, and foreign or outside assistance.<sup>63</sup> Where as, General Sir Frank Kitson, author and former Commander-in-Chief of UK Land Forces, argues that subversion and insurgency are “opposite sides of the same coin”. In other words, subversion is the use of all measures except armed force by one group of people of a country to overthrow the existing governing body.<sup>64</sup> Insurgency, according to Kitson, therefore, is the use of armed force by a section of the people against the government to change the existing governing order.<sup>65</sup>

Additional analysis of these definitions reveals threads of continuity that can be used to construct a working definition of insurgency. For example, each of the above definitions specifically recognizes insurgency as a struggle for change to the “existing order” or “ruling authorities.” Each acknowledges the political nature of the struggle and focus on the support of the people. Insurgency, commonly viewed as a method taken by the weak against the strong, is asymmetric, methodical, and protracted. Therefore, insurgency is the protracted means of warfare taken by a weaker adversary to change the existing political order. This is accomplished through the use of asymmetric actions that are viewed as unacceptable political processes by the ruling authority—including violence, armed force, and/or terrorism for the purposes of coercion. The use of this definition must include the implied characteristics of insurgency as well, i.e.

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Kitson argues that these measures could include the use of political and economic pressure, strikes, protests marches, propaganda, and small-scale violence, i.e. terrorism, for purposes of coercion. Unfortunately, most of these “subversive” actions are acceptable and legal in liberal democracies—violence being the exception—therefore, the term subversion is problematic for this study. Kitson also acknowledges that subversion and insurgency can be happening simultaneously as complimentary efforts or sequentially as a progression of efforts. Therefore, for the purpose of this study, subversion by itself is not relevant, however, its relationship to insurgency either as a complimentary action or as a precursor to insurgency is important.

<sup>65</sup> Frank Kitson, *Low Intensity Operations: Subversion, Insurgency, and Peacekeeping*. (St. Petersburg, Florida: Hailer Publishing, 1971), 3.

insurgency is political, asymmetric, and methodical in nature. Furthermore, the focus is on winning the “hearts and minds” of the people through the use of a cause. Next, it is necessary to analyze this definition as it pertains to al Qaeda’s conduct and rhetoric to demonstrate whether or not it meets the definition of insurgency.

## **Al Qaeda as Insurgency**

As noted in the previous chapter, al Qaeda is attempting to change the existing order of the Muslim movement from the apostate national state system inherited from the post colonial era, to the reestablishment of the Islamic Caliphate. O’Neill points out, “In the words of Al Qaida theoretician Faris Al Shuwayl al-Zaharani, ‘The rulers of the countries of Islam in this age are all apostate, unbelieving tyrants who have departed in every way from Islam. Muslims who proclaim God’s unity have no other choice than iron and fire, jihad in the way of God, to restore the caliphate according to the Prophet’s teachings.’”<sup>66</sup> This “jihad in the way of God” is the asymmetric insurgent method that al Qaeda has chosen to restore the moral order as they believe it should be. The ruling authorities that al Qaeda is trying to remove consider this method to be unacceptable and outside the parameters of legitimate political discourse.<sup>67</sup>

As previously noted, insurgency is ultimately a political contest in which the immediate objective is to gain the support of the people for a particular cause. According to O’Neill, the cause that al Qaeda and like-minded groups believe in is that, “political rule should be based on the Koran and Sunnah-Hadith (traditions and saying of Mohammed) as codified in the sharia

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<sup>66</sup> Bard E O’Neill, *Insurgency & Terrorism: From Revolution to Apocalypse*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. (Washington, D.C: Potomac Books, Inc., 2005), 22

<sup>67</sup> As noted above, insurgency is a method of warfare taken by the weak against the strong and this asymmetry in power/resources leads to a protracted campaign. At this time, there are no indications that al Qaeda can directly take on the military power of any of sovereign states that make up the geographical area associated with the Islamic Caliphate, let alone the United States; therefore, they strike asymmetrically through the use of terrorism and guerilla attacks where possible.

(Islamic law).”<sup>68</sup> Both O’Neill and Galula concede the necessity of a cause to be self evident in order for an insurgency to exist, but that the utility of the cause to the people in the end determines its success. The Bush Administration acknowledged this concept as early as the 2002 National Security Strategy of the United States, which states, “The war on terrorism is not a clash of civilizations. It does, however, reveal the clash inside a civilization, a battle for the future of the Muslim world. This is a struggle of ideas and this is an area where America must excel.”<sup>69</sup> However, this statement implies that al Qaeda and America are direct competitors for the hearts and minds of the people that would make up the “Islamic Caliphate.” Unfortunately, in this context the current construct favors al Qaeda, because as was noted earlier, al Qaeda sees their “near term” enemy as the apostate regimes of the Middle East not the United States. Therefore, what al Qaeda is presenting is something different than what the current regimes in the Middle East offer—most of which are authoritative and corrupt. The United States in this construct is seen as an outsider, at best, or as a manipulating enabler of these regimes, at worst—recalling old visions of the colonial master. Consequently, no matter how repugnant al Qaeda’s cause may seem to westerners, it can still be seen as a viable option to the masses under the rule of authoritative regimes. Regrettably, the United States cannot directly counter al Qaeda’s offer except in those places which it has militarily committed itself—Iraq and Afghanistan. Christopher Henzel points out that al Qaeda’s leadership also understands that this is a political struggle to secure the hearts and minds of the masses, in his 2001 book, *Knights Under the Prophet’s Banner*, Ayman al Zawahiri writes,

...Because the terrain in the key Arab countries is not suitable for guerilla war, Islamists need to conduct political action among the masses, combined with an urban terrorist campaign against the secular regimes, supplemented with attacks

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<sup>68</sup> Bard E O’Neill, *Insurgency & Terrorism: From Revolution to Apocalypse*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. (Washington, D.C: Potomac Books, Inc., 2005), 22.

<sup>69</sup> President of the United States. *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*. (Washington D.C.: September 2002), 31.

on “the external enemy”—i.e., the United States and Israel—as a means of propaganda that will strengthen the jihad’s popular support.<sup>70</sup>

In this sense, al Qaeda’s use of propaganda can be taken as an attempt to justify their terrorist actions and bring attention and legitimacy to their cause. So, it is fair to conclude that al Qaeda’s cause potentially provides utility to the “people” if the people do not feel satisfied with their current authorities.<sup>71</sup>

Additionally, Galula, O’Neill, Jones, and Kitson along with many others agree that terrorism is a tactic usually associated with insurgency warfare. Terrorism is a tactic employed by al Qaeda to not only bring attention to its cause and intimidate the undecided public but to also create a problem for the government to solve.<sup>72</sup> This tactic is being played out in al Qaeda’s terrorists campaign in Afghanistan and Iraq, targeting both coalition troops and civilians. For Example, Henzel illustrates,

The Salafists’ current strategy, as Zawahiri described, is to provoke, on an international scale, a cycle of violence and repression that will mobilize the Sunni masses. The American invasion of Afghanistan failed to bring about this mobilization. However, the invasion and occupation of Iraq, combined with US support of Israel’s policies in the occupied territories, may at last be triggering the radicalization of the masses and middle classes of the Arab world that al Qaeda has hoped for.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Christopher Henzel, “Origins of Al Qaeda Ideology: Implications for U.S. Strategy,” *Parameters* Vol. XXXV, no. 1 (Spring 2005), 76.

<sup>71</sup> In addition to a cause, insurgency leadership must also draw attention to and address a significant problem that is not being satisfied by the ruling authorities as well as provide an alternative to the status quo. In some cases this problem can also define the cause, as noted earlier, the apostate regimes can be blamed for any and all failings of their rule due to their failure to faithfully govern in the way of the Koran and Sunnah-Hadith.

<sup>72</sup> For example, if the government ignores the terrorism inflicted on the public, eventually the people will believe that the ruling authorities are either too incompetent or too weak to respond effectively to the terrorism, thus creating doubt about the government’s credibility. Even worse, the perceived lack of effective response to terrorism by the authorities would signal that they do not care about the people’s welfare, thus casting doubt on their legitimacy to govern. On the other hand, if the government overreacts and cracks down too hard on the general public with measures that limit their lives or freedoms, these measures may, in the end, boost the attractiveness of the insurgents’ cause and push recruits into the insurgents’ camp.

<sup>73</sup> Christopher Henzel, “Origins of Al Qaeda Ideology: Implications for U.S. Strategy,” *Parameters* Vol. XXXV, no. 1 (Spring 2005), 79.

In others words, the GWOT, as the United States' reaction to the attacks on September 11, 2001, could very well be the exact response for which al Qaeda hoped as a rally to their cause.

Fortunately, to date, GWOT has yet to provide al Qaeda with the "radicalization of the masses" to which it had aspired as the desired outcome. However, if the strategy continues to be perceived as too militaristic in its approach, then a tipping point may be reached. This is the real danger facing GWOT as a strategy.

## **Insurgent Classification**

Al Qaeda, as distinguished by its aspirations and operations to date, satisfies the definition of an insurgent organization. Now that the organization's methods have been defined as insurgency, it will be useful to categorize the type of insurgent organization that the group best reflects. O'Neill addresses insurgency as its own specific form of warfare and has put together a comprehensive classification of insurgency types. He classifies these types based on motives, organizational structure, and ultimate goals of the organization. O'Neill's research indicates that there are nine types of insurgents: anarchists, egalitarians, traditionalists, pluralists, apocalyptic-utopians, secessionists, reformists, preservationists, and commercialists. Based on their motives, O'Neill identifies the first five of these to be of the revolutionary variety (anarchists, egalitarians, traditionalists, pluralists, and apocalyptical-utopians) because, "they seek to change an existing political system completely."<sup>74</sup> The remaining four have more limited and alternative goals than the revolutionary type. Their goals are varied as they relate to each other, they are: secessionists, reformists, preservations, and commercialists. He clearly suggests that Al Qaeda and similar groups fall into the category of the traditionalist insurgent. According to O'Neill, a traditional insurgent places, "an emphasis on values and norms, that legitimize a small, centralized ruling

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<sup>74</sup> Bard E O'Neill, *Insurgency & Terrorism: From Revolution to Apocalypse*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. (Washington, D.C: Potomac Books, Inc., 2005), 20-28. O'Neill goes into much greater detail on each insurgent type than is necessary for this discussion.



elite” and features a “passive rather than active involvement in politics on the part of the majority of the population.”<sup>75</sup> O’Neill further classifies al Qaeda into a subset of the traditionalist he calls a reactionary-traditionalist. Reactionary- traditionalist insurgents are, “more zealous groups seeking to reestablish an ancient political system that they idealize as a golden age.” They believe that political rule should be based on the teachings of the Holy Koran and the traditions and sayings of Muhammad (Sunnah-Hadith) as codified by Islamic Law known as Sharia Law. They are frequently referred to as *salafis* (from *al-salaf al-salih*, or “pious forbearers”) and further believe that only Muslims should exercise political and military responsibilities. Those Muslims that do exercise governing responsibilities should be overthrown if they do not do so in accordance with Sharia Law.<sup>76</sup> Understanding the type of insurgency being faced enables one to appreciate its goals, motives, and strategies when considering a counterstrategy.

### **Al Qaeda’s Success to Date**

Understanding what constitutes a successful insurgency is as varied as the range of definitions of insurgency itself. Therefore, it is necessary to take a similar approach when determining the effectiveness of an insurgency by examining several criteria of insurgency development to determine al Qaeda’s success to date. In order to determine insurgency success, an examination of several leading theorists of insurgency and counterinsurgency principles will be used as the evaluation criteria. To assess al Qaeda’s success to date, its actions and status will be compared to this criteria. However, the assessment does not pretend to predict future success or failure, but rather discusses its potential.

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 20-22.

## Galula's Prerequisites for Successful Insurgency

In his work *Counterinsurgency Warfare, Theory and Practice*, David Galula asserts that the prerequisites for a successful insurgency must include a cause, weakness of the counterinsurgent, geographic conditions, and outside support.<sup>77</sup> He contends that an attractive cause is the first basic necessity for an insurgency to take hold and expand. The cause itself must be strategic in nature, that is, it should appeal to the broadest number of people while driving away the least.<sup>78</sup> As previously noted, al Qaeda's cause has been adopted by a growing number of disaffected members of the greater Islamic community; however, it is one that has many opponents as well. So, its cause may not have the strategic voice that it needs at this stage to advance the insurgency forward. Additionally, Galula notes that ideally a cause should address an "unresolved contradiction." If no problem exists then a cause cannot grow; however, there are always plenty of problems any given country will have that can allow the insurgent to exploit.<sup>79</sup> Al Qaeda attempts to do this with its message that Sharia Law and the teachings of the Holy Koran are the answer to every problem faced by Muslim societies. They struggle to do this at both the national and the regional/ global level. One could argue that finding a cause that satisfies a range of problems that cut across several cultures and sovereign states is much more difficult when attempting to globalize an insurgency. This is a potential exploitable weakness of al Qaeda's cause.

Galula next looks at the weakness of the counterinsurgent to determine the potential success of an insurgency. Again, this depends on where al Qaeda is determined to make its stand. For example, in Saudi Arabia, the government has vast resources, is well organized, and has

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<sup>77</sup> David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*. Revised Ed. (United States of America: Hailer Publishing, 2005), 18-39. It should be noted that Galula's work was written in the post World War II era as an analysis of the rising insurgent activities associated with revolutionary war in the ideological struggles and ant-colonial movements of the Cold War period.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, 19-20.

support from the United States; thus, al Qaeda would have difficulty overthrowing the House of Saud at this point. On the other hand, Pakistan, with its current volatile political situation, may provide al Qaeda a greater degree of success in its struggle to establish a base from which to carry the global insurgency forward. Al Qaeda had successfully accomplished this task in Afghanistan through peaceful cooperation with the like-minded Taliban regime during the late 1990's until their defeat in early 2002 at the hands of the American led coalition in Operation Enduring Freedom. In both Afghanistan and Iraq, it appears that al Qaeda's attempt to foment local insurgencies in these two newly formed governments has been stalemated by the strategies and tactics of coalition operations.

Since al Qaeda is a global phenomenon, the geographical conditions to which Galula refers are diverse and challenging. However, in a transnational, global reality the remoteness of geography does not necessarily translate to isolation. Shawn Brimley writes that:

While geography certainly plays into the difficulties in tracking down figures like Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri in the mountainous Northwest Frontier Province in Pakistan, the process of globalization has created a newly difficult topography that terrorists can use to great benefit. The post-Cold War era has been defined by the increase in connectivity and linkages between states and among societies. Conveniences such as the Internet, instant banking, cheap travel, and mobile phones greatly increase the global reach of terrorist organizations. From planning detailed and synchronous operations, to communicating intent and doctrine, and to the recruitment of new members, modern transnational terror groups gain strength and capability by using a global system that at once favors the offensive and allows for greater operational security.<sup>80</sup>

In other words, the global system of the 21st-century, which ironically exists largely to the credit of the West, particularly the United States, creates offensive operational benefits for transnational groups like al Qaeda. Additionally, it has changed the strategic environment in ways that can negate the inaccessibility of once remote terrain. Therefore, geography still plays the role of

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid, 21.

<sup>80</sup> Shawn Brimley, "Tentacles of Jihad: Targeting Transnational Support Networks," *Parameters* Vol. XXXVI (Summer 2006), 33.

either providing or denying sanctuary to insurgents from counterinsurgent operations. However, sanctuaries resulting from global communication capabilities no longer constrain insurgents from conducting offensive operations, communications, planning, or from isolating the insurgents from their intelligence networks. In sum, geography is not as necessary in the strategic context of a global insurgency, but still plays a significant role in the operational and tactical tasks of “changing the existing political order.”

Regarding outside support, Brimley notes, “The ability to draw resources from various financial sources, such as regional drug and criminal networks, for example, bequeaths to this transnational movement a logistical capability that helps to perpetuate its continued survival in a hostile environment.”<sup>81</sup> Additionally, other sources of support come from diasporas—ethnic or religious communities living in other nations that maintain strong ties to their home countries, wealthy individuals, and illicit activities. Similar to how global communication capabilities have minimized the influence of geography for a successful insurgency, the global economy and global communications have facilitated the gaining of outside support for an insurgency of a global nature. In both cases, isolating the insurgency is much more difficult when that insurgency has a global, transnational aspect.

In sum, using Galula’s criteria, al Qaeda, as a transnational global insurgency, has a competitive advantage in both geographic conditions and outside support. Conversely, it has less of an advantage when it comes to a cause—specifically in the strategic sense, and is relatively weak when faced with a strong political regime, i.e., one that effectively addresses the needs of its citizens, has a national consensus to govern, or one that can strictly control the political structure and the population. Additionally, resolute counterinsurgent leadership and knowledge of

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 35.

counterinsurgency warfare is also a factor when determining the strength of a political regime.<sup>82</sup> Therefore, al Qaeda's ability to succeed rests on its ability to overcome the weakness of its cause and its inability to directly confront local counterinsurgent forces without jeopardizing its strengths of dispersion and secrecy. The ability of al Qaeda to leverage its strength through the use of the global economy and global communications allows it to remain resilient and active despite coalition actions to date.

### Maoist People's War

According to Mao Zedong's classic *People's War* and its subsequent adaptation by Ho Chi Minh and General Vo-Nguyen Giap, an insurgency progresses through, "three phases: first, insurgent agitation and proselytization among the masses—the phase of contention; second, overt violence, guerrilla operations, and the establishment of bases—the equilibrium phase; and third, open warfare between insurgent and government forces designed to topple the existing regime—the counteroffensive phase."<sup>83</sup> Based on al Qaeda's actions prior to the 9-11 attacks, a case could be made that al Qaeda was in the early stages of the second phase—equilibrium phase. They had already conducted numerous attacks against apostate regimes and United States interests in an effective agitation and recruitment effort during the contention phase. Additionally, they had established a base of operations nested within the Taliban Regime in Afghanistan. One could also argue that the direct attacks on the U.S. homeland on September 11, 2001, were manifestations of al Qaeda's maturing of phase two operations—the equilibrium phase—with overt violence and guerilla operations. Arguments have been presented that the attack on the Pentagon could fit the definition of a guerrilla operation as well as be considered terrorism since the Pentagon

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<sup>82</sup> David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*. Revised Ed. (United States of America: Hailer Publishing, 2005), 26-27.

<sup>83</sup> Andrew Kepinevich, Jr. *The Army and Vietnam*. (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1986), 7.

represented a “military” target as well as a civilian target. Certainly, the attack on the USS Cole could be viewed less as a terrorist attack than as a guerilla operation. However, with the loss of Afghanistan as a base of operations and in the absence of another successful attack on the U.S., it appears that the American response to 9-11 knocked al Qaeda back to phase one operations. Al Qaeda in Iraq and Afghanistan could be considered phase three capabilities, i.e. open warfare with government forces, but there is no evidence that al Qaeda could succeed in these campaigns. Certainly, it does not appear that al Qaeda is capable of contending directly with counterinsurgent operations in the near future. In summary, using Mao’s formulation, al Qaeda is possibly in early phase two of insurgent development, at best or is still in phase one, at worst.

### Metz’s and Millen’s Effective Insurgency Factors

Dr. Steven Metz, current Chairman of the Regional Strategy and Planning Department and Research Professor of National Security Affairs at the Strategic Studies Institute; and Raymond Millen, currently assigned as the Director of European Security Studies at the Strategic Studies Institute, use a more contemporary examination. They claim that an effective insurgency depends largely on the strength of the regime against which the insurgency is directed. If the regime is strong, determined, and knowledgeable about counterinsurgency principles then all of the following factors must be present for the insurgent movement to succeed: pre-conditions, effective strategy, effective ideology, effective leadership, and resources.<sup>84</sup> Metz and Millen also state that, “when facing a weak, disorganized, corrupt, divided, repressive, or ineffective regime, insurgents can overcome the absence of one or even several of the conditions.”<sup>85</sup> In order to

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<sup>84</sup> Steven Metz and Raymond Millen. “Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Reconceptualizing Threat and Response,” *Strategic Studies Institute* (November 2004). <http://www.StrategicStudiesInstitute.army.mil/html> (accessed August 15, 2007), 5-8

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 5-6.

analyze al Qaeda's effectiveness using Metz's and Millen's criteria, it is necessary to provide definitions of these factors.

Preconditions, in Metz's and Millen's, context equates to a frustration not being satisfied by the existing political system.<sup>86</sup> Their use of precondition echoes Galula's concept of an effective cause, one that addresses an "unresolved contradiction." Again, there are many dysfunctional regimes that encompass the geographical area represented by the Islamic Caliphate that can be exploited for their inept governance. Yet, al Qaeda has yet to "radicalize the masses" under a coherent and unifying cause. Al Qaeda has, however, been able to continually recruit enough new members and believers to remain a viable threat. As long as they remain a threat and successfully recruit, the danger exists that al Qaeda will eventually find its unifying cause.

Regarding effective strategy, Metz and Millen contend:

The strategy of an insurgent movement is built on three simultaneous and interlinked components: 1) force protection (via dispersion, sanctuary, the use of complex terrain, effective counterintelligence, etc.); 2) actions to erode the will, strength and legitimacy of the regime (via violence and political-psychological programs); and, 3) augmentation of resources and support.<sup>87</sup>

Concerning force protection, al Qaeda's strength is its network and its ability to remain dispersed in order to retain its high degree of anonymity. Al Qaeda also uses the sanctuary of ungoverned areas as a means of force protection. This is done in remote geographical areas out of reach of effective rule as well as in large urban centers where the mass of humanity and complexity of the environment supports secrecy. Pertaining to al Qaeda's actions designed to erode the "will, strength and legitimacy of the regime" the conclusions are less concrete. Many regimes have been the target of al Qaeda's actions, specifically terrorist acts, but none to date have crumbled as a result. That does not mean, however, that al Qaeda's actions are not having an impact. Many regimes, such as Pakistan, Sudan, Somalia, Yemen, Iraq, and Afghanistan, remain vulnerable.

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

This is evident by the fact that no regime has completely eliminated al Qaeda's presence or influence from its state. With references to augmentation and resources, al Qaeda continues to successfully gather financial and other resources necessary to carry out their campaigns. As noted earlier, al Qaeda effectively uses the global economy and global communications, along with exploiting well established illicit activity networks, to thwart many of the traditional financial generating processes that are more vulnerable to disruption by coalition efforts.

Referring to effective ideology, Metz and Millen note that, "national insurgencies in particular depend on ideology to unify, inspire, explain why the existing system is unjust or illegitimate, and rationalize the use of violence to alter or overthrow the existing system."<sup>88</sup> They go on to further explain that, "An effective insurgent ideology, in other words, must 'fit' a given society."<sup>89</sup> The challenge then facing al Qaeda as a transnational insurgency is to find an ideology that fits many different societies—a "one size fits all" solution. Their solution to date has been to try to accuse target regimes of "losing their way" by not adhering to the fundamental tenets of Sharia Law and the teachings of the Holy Koran and also by their association with the infidel West, particularly the United States. Metz and Millen reinforce this view, "In the broadest sense, the ideologies which underlie 21st century insurgencies decry the injustice of globalization. Because the United States is seen as the engineer of the existing world order, many insurgent ideologies define the United States and its partner regimes as the enemy."<sup>90</sup> Again, a "one size fits all" ideology is less effective than one that speaks directly to the problems and frustrations found in a particular society under the authority of a particular regime.

Next, Metz and Millen factor in insurgency leadership, they state that, "Successful insurgent leaders are those who can unify diverse groups and organizations and impose their will

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 10.



under situations of high stress.”<sup>91</sup> Therefore, effective leadership requires a larger than life personality that demands dedication, perseverance, and unswerving devotion to the “cause.”

According to Metz and Millen effective leaders are those that:

Become obsessive ‘true believers’ of nearly mythical status, driven by vision, often building a cult of leadership. Similarly, they tend to believe so strongly in their cause that they become completely ruthless, willing to do anything necessary to protect their movement and weaken the counterinsurgents. Insurgent leadership is not a business for the faint of heart, but for the utterly committed and obsessive.<sup>92</sup>

Certainly, Osama bin Laden and Ayman al Zawahiri as the leaders and founders of al Qaeda fit this description perfectly. Both are true believers who have demonstrated their resolve and resiliency in the face of hardship and great danger. Many young Muslims idolize Osama bin Laden as a mythical cult hero. His likeness is sold on t-shirts and his image is used to represent Muslim disenfranchisement within the current world order. Speculation as to whether bin Laden is still alive or whether he was killed in battle only heightens his status. If still alive, he has succeeded in thwarting America’s attempts to capture or kill him—an event that many Arabs would view with pride and satisfaction. If discovered to be dead, he has died in defense of his beliefs, making him immortal as a martyr. Zawahiri, al Qaeda’s “number two man,” has moved front and center in recent years as the primary spokesman for the movement, thus, fueling speculation of bin Laden’s demise. Despite the speculation, both of these leaders continue to successfully represent the ideological purity of the movement.

However, al Qaeda is a complex network of individuals ideologically linked together. In this context, traditional leadership evaluations may not be as relevant, but instead a different approach may be necessary in order to assess their capability. For example, noted authors on Complexity Theory and Leadership, Russ Marion and Mary Uhl-Bien, contend that:

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

Al-Qaeda is composed of a diversity of individuals and groups who join based on common need and shared vision (e.g., they internalize the goals and values), are provided with resources and contacts with whom they can develop plans for attack, and then are told to “go wreak havoc on the enemy” (e.g., the mission) without requirements for bureaucratic oversight or micro-managing from above. Such a system represents an incredibly forceful and resilient organizational form.<sup>93</sup>

Understanding that al Qaeda as an organizational structure is a complex network system, traditional means of evaluating leadership prove to be inadequate. Complexity Theory is a new and developing field that may yet yield an ability to accurately assess complex leadership capabilities. Until then, it can be acknowledged, that despite the killing and capturing of numerous second and third tier leaders, al Qaeda as an organization has been extremely adaptable at regeneration.

The final factor for effective insurgency is resources. Metz and Millen contend that, “In the broadest terms, insurgents need five types of resources: 1) manpower; 2) funding; 3) equipment/supplies, particularly access to arms, munitions, and explosives; 4) sanctuary (internal or internal+external); and, 5) intelligence.”<sup>94</sup> By all accounts, al Qaeda has continued to be able to find and buy these resources in enough quantities to keep their organization sustained. Manpower remains steady, but has not expanded to support the mass mobilizations required to move the movement to the level necessary to overthrow any of its targeted regimes. Despite the United States’ success in freezing financial assets determined to be related to al Qaeda, the organization has been able to find sufficient alternative funding streams to continue to finance operations. However, according to Metz and Millen this pressure from the United States on external supporters means that, “insurgents therefore must devote extensive effort to fundraising or income generation. This increasingly leads them into coalition with organized crime, or to

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<sup>93</sup> Russ Marion and Mary Uhl-Bein. “Complexity Theory and Al Qaeda: Examining Complex Leadership” *Emergence*, Vol 5, Issue # 1 (2003), 74.

become criminal organizations themselves. While this is, in a sense, a distraction, it diminishes the need for external sponsors and even the mass public.”<sup>95</sup> Regarding equipment/supplies, sanctuary, and intelligence Shawn Brimley notes:

The ways in which our enemies learn and adapt to pressure, as well as recruit followers and resupply combatants, offer important insights into the nature of the conflict. Using safe houses, smuggling rings, secured communications, and personnel who connect individuals to training and support networks, our enemies benefit from an interconnected global system that enables violent groups and handicaps intelligence and law enforcement agencies.<sup>96</sup>

Using Metz and Millen’s factors, al Qaeda has proven to be a complex adaptive organization that continues to find ways to stay relevant despite increased pressure from the United States and other coalition allies.

In summary, by using the above criteria from Galula, Mao, and Metz and Millen, al Qaeda can be described as an insurgent organization that is highly complex and adaptive and has demonstrated a great deal of resiliency and restorative capacity. At the same time, the conclusions also expose the weakness of al Qaeda as a global, transnational insurgency. For example, the primary challenge facing al Qaeda is to find a potent cause that can unite the ‘masses’ from several different national cultures and identities. Currently, al Qaeda’s cause is too general and idealistic to provide practical relief to problems of a specific nature in a specific country against a specific government. Until al Qaeda can find a way to meet that challenge, they will have difficulty moving their insurgency forward. The second challenge confronting al Qaeda is its ability to directly challenge the authorities of apostate regimes, the United States, and coalition partners. This challenge also relates to the first because without a cause that unifies the masses, al Qaeda will not have the necessary comparative strength to challenge the power of a state directly.

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<sup>94</sup> Steven Metz and Raymond Millen. “Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Reconceptualizing Threat and Response,” *Strategic Studies Institute* (November 2004). <http://www.StrategicStudiesInstitute.army.mil/html> (accessed August 15, 2007), 7-8.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 13.

Additionally, if in the future, al Qaeda determines it has the strength to confront the power of any of these states directly, it will jeopardize its inherit position as an organization of dispersion and anonymity in order to do so. In the end, this struggle can be seen as a race against time between al Qaeda's search to find the cause that unites the masses and gives it the necessary strength to effectively challenge targeted regimes, and the United States and its coalition partners to develop a strategy that contains al Qaeda's aspirations, and thwarts its efforts to be a viable movement and organization.

According to Hebert A. Simon, "solving a problem simply means representing it so as to make the solution transparent."<sup>97</sup> The next section of this chapter will suppose that the preceding reframing of the nature of the conflict from a "War against Terror" to a Global Insurgency provides a readily apparent counterstrategy framework by adapting counterinsurgency principles to fit a Global Counterinsurgency strategy. However, this is not intended to imply that a solution is easily achieved nor that understanding the principles of a global COIN construct will guarantee success.

### **GLOBAL COIN (A Case for Reframing the Global War on Terror):**

A global COIN construct is only a starting point for further strategy development. Just as with conventional operations, no two counterinsurgency campaigns are exactly the same. Nevertheless, having a framework allows planners to adapt principles that apply to a particular situation. The current GWOT construct is not a construct at all, but rather a branding of a collection of disparate and uncoordinated government responses. In reality, GWOT was the military policy response to the emerging post 9-11 security threat. As discussed in chapter 2, this

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<sup>96</sup> Shawn Brimley, "Tentacles of Jihad: Targeting Transnational Support Networks," *Parameters* Vol. XXXVI (Summer 2006), 30

<sup>97</sup> Herbert A. Simon, *The Sciences of the Artificial*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), 132. Simon attributes this quote Saul Amarel, "On the Mechanization of Creative Process," *IEEE Spectrum* 3 (April 1966), 112-114.

response coupled with the general acceptance of the language to describe the security environment has created the overly militaristic approach of the current U.S. government approach. The hope is that by reframing the environment in terms of an insurgency/counterinsurgency dynamic and refocusing the efforts against an enemy that has its own set of ends, ways, and means; a more integrated holistic approach will emerge.

Since the concept of al Qaeda as a global insurgency was put forth previously in this chapter, the purpose of this section is to expand on the concept by recommending to use the assessment of al Qaeda as global insurgency to craft a global counterinsurgency strategy. This recommended approach is neither original nor new, but rather a recognition of the need to change. Already, the United States Department of State has produced a whole of government approach to the current security environment called *Counterinsurgency for U.S. Government Policy Makers: A Work in Progress*. This effort is a promising trend that should be carried forward by all instruments of national power. As the United States' chief ally, the United Kingdom has also put forth a similar whole of government method called *The Comprehensive Approach*. This approach is a conceptual framework used to bolster the current, Cabinet Office-led, methodology to coordinating the objectives and activities of Government Departments in identifying, analyzing, planning and executing national responses to complex situations.<sup>98</sup> Although not specifically calling itself a counterinsurgency model, nonetheless, it addresses many of the same limitations exposed in the U.S. government's implementation of GWOT. Additionally, *The Comprehensive Approach* addresses the security challenges as a political contest rather than a conventional military struggle; therefore, evoking many of the same principles found in COIN theory.

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<sup>98</sup> Director General, Chief of Staff, Ministry of Defence. Joint Discussion Note 4/05, *The Comprehensive Approach*. (Shrivenham, United Kingdom, January 2006) 1-2.

The joint military definition of COIN as articulated in FM 3-24 is, “those military, paramilitary, political, economic, psychological, and civic actions taken by a government to defeat insurgency.”<sup>99</sup> The Department of State defines COIN as:

COIN is the combination of measures adopted to defeat an insurgency, and ideally will include integrated or synchronized political, security, economic, and informational components that reinforce governmental legitimacy and competence while reducing insurgent influence over the population. COIN strategies should be designed to simultaneously protect the population and prevent insurgent violence; strengthen government institutions’ capacity and legitimacy to govern responsibly, including redress of legitimate grievances; and marginalize insurgents politically, socially, and militarily.<sup>100</sup>

Both of these definitions acknowledge the need for all instruments of national power to be necessary to defeat an insurgency. The Department of State’s definition specifically points to the need for coordination, synchronizing, and integration of these instruments; where as, the Department of Defense’s merely implies the need. Also implicit with in both is the need for a responsible person or agency to take charge of this effort—an office of responsible control for unity of effort. Indeed, Andrew Krepinevich, former Army officer, author, professor of national security affairs at the U.S. Military Academy, and currently the Executive Secretariat in the Office of the Secretary of Defense notes, for counterinsurgency to be successful:

... requires coordination among many government organizations, of which the military is only one, albeit the largest. Because of the political and social nature of the conflict and the myriad nonmilitary institutions involved, a unified approach that orchestrates the multidimensional elements of the governments’ counterinsurgency strategy is essential.<sup>101</sup>

Consequently, the National Security Council, as the staff responsible to the President for advice regarding the integration of domestic, foreign, and military policies and management of the

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<sup>99</sup> U.S. Department of the Army. FM 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*. (Washington, D.C.: December 15, 2006) Glossary-4.

<sup>100</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Counterinsurgency for U.S. Government Policy Makers: A Work in Progress*, (Washington, D.C.: October 2007), 12.

<sup>101</sup> Andrew F. Krepinevich, Jr. *The Army and Vietnam*. (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1986), 15.

processes through which the President's policies are coordinated and implemented,<sup>102</sup> should instinctively assume this role with regards to counterinsurgency strategy development and implementation. However, effective coordination and integration requires more than just management of the processes, it demands an understanding of counterinsurgency principles.

## Counterinsurgency Principles

Since counterinsurgency strategy is inextricably linked to and should be tailored for the insurgency that it opposes, developing useful counterinsurgency principles can at times be elusive and too generalized.<sup>103</sup> Certainly David Galula felt this frustration when he noted, "Where as in conventional war, either side can initiate a revolutionary war, only one—the insurgent—can initiate a revolutionary war, for counterinsurgency is only an effect of insurgency. Furthermore, counterinsurgency cannot be defined except by reference to its cause."<sup>104</sup> In other words, a

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<sup>102</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Counterinsurgency for U.S. Government Policy Makers: A Work in Progress*, (Washington, D.C.: October 2007), 29.

<sup>103</sup> Two sources that provide useful and adaptable principles are the U.S. Department of the Army's FM 3-24 (also known as Marine Corps Warfighting Publication [MCWP 3-33.5] *Counterinsurgency* and Joseph D. Celeski's, *Operationalizing COIN*. These two sources were chosen for their integrating of historical COIN principles with those recently discovered that apply to modern insurgencies, as they exist today. The following are principles of COIN found in FM 3-24: 1) Legitimacy is the main objective; 2) unity of effort is essential; 3) political factors are primary; 4) counterinsurgents must understand the environment; 5) Intelligence drives operations; 6) insurgents must be isolated from their cause; 7) security under the rule of law is essential; 8) counterinsurgents should prepare for a long-term commitment; 9) management of information and expectations is critical; 10) counterinsurgents must determine the appropriate level of force when responding to insurgent activities; 11) counterinsurgents must learn and adapt to be successful; 12) counterinsurgents must empower the lowest echelon of decision makers; and 13) US and coalition forces must not lose sight that they are there to support the host nation. (US Department of the Army. *FM 3-24, Counterinsurgency*. [Wash., DC: Dec. 15, 2006], 1-20—1-26). Joseph Celeski notes ten such principles: 1) The political objective outweighs the military objective; 2) legitimacy; 3) selection of appropriate and adaptable strategy; 4) unity of effort and unity of command; 5) coordinated and multi-layered intelligence and information system; 6) win the "hearts and minds" of the populace; 7) utilization of professional counterinsurgency forces and the conduct of minimal military operations; 8) use of indigenous forces—counterorganization; 9) denial of sanctuary and external support; and 10) patience. (Joseph D. Celeski. *Operationalizing COIN*. [Hurler Field, FL: The JSOU Press, 2005], 90-95.

<sup>104</sup> David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*. Revised Ed. (United States of America: Hailer Publishing, 2005), 21. In this reference, Galula notes that Revolutionary War consists of insurgency and counterinsurgency.

specific counterinsurgency campaign by its nature is reactive in nature and takes on the characteristics of the insurgency it intends to counter. Despite this challenge, enough similarities exist throughout the vast history of counterinsurgency warfare to glean some commonalities in which to build upon. With this in mind, the key to a successful global counterinsurgency strategy is to establish principles that are general enough to account for the various potentialities, yet specific enough to be useful.

## **Gaps in Global Counterinsurgency Theory**

In researching this topic, significant gaps were discovered in current counterinsurgency theory and the application of a global counterinsurgency strategy. For instance, most counterinsurgency theory relates to revolutionary wars internal to a particular state. These insurgencies can involve international actors but the movements themselves are confined to a particular country. Most studies of counterinsurgent theory focus on operational principles and tactical considerations. At best, case studies focus attention at the theater strategic level, whereas, the purpose of this section is to raise the notion of counterinsurgency as a part of the national security strategy to counter al Qaeda's global insurgency. Consequently, the challenge of formulating counterinsurgent strategy is one of taking operational principles and translating them into strategic concepts relating to political goals. As noted already, al Qaeda has found it difficult to make a "one size fits all" cause work effectively in a transnational global insurgent context. So, too, the United States will find it difficult to construct a unifying, overarching counterinsurgency strategy.

However, that being said, what the United States must contend with, as its bottom-line, stated policy, is its current National Security Strategy,

It is the policy of the United States to seek and support democratic movements and institutions in every nation and culture, with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world. In the world today, the fundamental character of regimes matters as much as the distribution of power among them. The goal of our statecraft is to help create a world of democratic, well-governed states that can



meet the needs of their citizens and conduct themselves responsibly in the international system. This is the best way to provide enduring security for the American people.<sup>105</sup>

Therefore, this policy *is* the overarching counterinsurgency strategy. The challenge facing the United States in executing this strategy is at least two fold. Firstly, how does the United States cope with allied regimes targeted by al Qaeda when those regimes do not meet the United States definition of “democratic” or “well-governed” states? Does the United States place conditions of support to sovereign governments based on this policy standard? Those with a global meliorism<sup>106</sup> view would say yes; however, this could lead to non-democratic allied regimes falling to an al Qaeda insurgency. Whereas, those with a realist outlook would say that it depends on American interests and this could lead to supporting regimes despite their human rights violations and lack of democratic institutions. To contend with this environment, a strategic choice will have to be made. A choice that could lead to either the United States’ reliability and loyalty being damaged, or its legitimacy and moral authority being diminished.

Secondly, how does the United States contend with the power vacuums created by the regime changes that it conducted with its recent GWOT military campaigns (OEF and OIF) in both Afghanistan and Iraq? As the United States has already learned, cultural context is important. What is considered good governance and democracy to one culture may look repressive and authoritative to another. In both these operational theaters, the difficulty of developing “democratic movements and institutions in every nation and culture” can be the single point of failure to achieving a stable “well governed” state that can “meet the needs of their

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<sup>105</sup> President of the United States. *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*. (Washington D.C.: March 2006), 1.

<sup>106</sup> Walter A. McDougall, *Promised Land, Crusader State: The American Encounter with the World Since 1776*, (Boston and New York: A Mariner Book: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1997), 173. McDougall defines global meliorism as, “simply the socio-economic and politico-cultural expression of an American mission to make the world a better place...the American model is universally valid, that the success of the American experiment itself ultimately depends on other nations escaping from dearth and oppression...”

citizens” Again, the strategic choices are difficult—continue to commit national treasure to these two situations or withdraw before these regimes are strong enough to resist an al Qaeda affiliated insurgency or before they have achieved sufficient democratization.

## **Summary**

In summary, this chapter set about to provide a working definition of insurgency and to make the case that al Qaeda’s methods meets that definition. Next it classified the type of insurgent group that al Qaeda most resembled. Bard O’Neill’s classification of al Qaeda as a reactionary-traditionalist insurgent group in his comprehensive study of insurgency and terrorism provided the best categorization. After defining and classifying al Qaeda, the chapter described al Qaeda’s actions and evaluated its success by applying criteria provide by three different insurgency theorists— two traditional theorist in David Galula and Mao Zedong, and one contemporary in the team of Raymond Metz and Steven Millen. Finally, the chapter concludes with a discussion of the relevancy of global counterinsurgency strategy to meet the challenges posed by al Qaeda’s global insurgency and identified significant gaps in applying counterinsurgency theory at the strategic level. The next chapter will discuss concluding remark regarding the research question and recommend areas for future research.

## Chapter 5—Conclusion

### Answering the Primary Research Question

The evidence presented in Chapter 2 of this monograph demonstrated that the GWOT is no longer adequate to address the character of the conflict. Chapter 3 clearly identified the enemy and its goals and objectives. Chapter 4 proved by the preponderance of the evidence that the true nature of the conflict is a global insurgency conducted by al Qaeda and its affiliated movements. The chapter classified the type of insurgent organization that al Qaeda best resembles and then assessed and drew conclusions regarding its success to date. Finally, the chapter concluded with a discussion of the relevancy of global counterinsurgency strategy to meet the challenges posed by al Qaeda's global insurgency and identified significant gaps in applying counterinsurgency theory at the strategic level.

In the end, it is clear that this conflict is a protracted, asymmetric war being waged by a militarily weak terrorist organization. The conflict is ultimately a political war of ideas, characterized by violence and terrorism aimed at the "apostate" governments and its people to coerce them to reestablish an ancient political system idealized as a "golden age." As Philip Gordon states,

Victory will come not when foreign leaders accept certain terms but when political changes erode and ultimately undermine support for the ideology and strategy of those determined to destroy the United States... when the ideology the terrorists espouse is discredited, when their tactics are seen to have failed, and when they come to find more promising paths to the dignity, respect, and opportunities they crave."<sup>107</sup>.

This aptly captures what should be the aim of a global counterinsurgency aimed at al Qaeda and its allies.

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<sup>107</sup> Philip H. Gordon, "Can the War on Terror Be Won?: How to Fight the Right War," *Foreign Affairs* Vol. 86, no. 6 (November/December 2007), 54.

## Areas for Future Research

Chapter four of this investigation noted several gaps in counterinsurgency principles at the strategic level. These gaps were especially pronounced regarding application in a global context and are recommended as areas for future study. For instance, some questions that current counterinsurgency theory does not address are: how should counterinsurgency theory account for insurgent activities in ungovernable areas? How should counterinsurgency strategy deal with insurgent activities across multiple sovereign states, with multiple allegiances, cultures, and forms of government? How does the significance of counterinsurgency strategy apply in countries before the physical materialization of the insurgency is apparent? How should the application of the instruments of national power other than military (Diplomatic, Information, Economic, Political, Social, and Infrastructure), be integrated into strategic counterinsurgency planning and execution. These are just a few examples of the type of challenges that must be solved when crafting a global counterinsurgency strategy. In the end, an approach that embraces an interagency, effects-based method of counterinsurgency planning is recommended. Such an approach should focus on key insurgent activities. Metz and Millen have provided useful metrics that could be used to assess such a counterinsurgency strategy. They contend that counterinsurgency strategy should be measured against these desired effects:

*Fracturing* the insurgent movement; *delegitimizing* the insurgent movement in the eyes of the local population and any international constituency, it might have; *demoralizing* the insurgent movement; *delinking* the insurgent movement from its internal and external support; and by *deresourcing* the insurgent movement both by curtailing funding streams and causing it to waste existing resources.<sup>108</sup>

This type of approach is less about particular counterinsurgent operations and more about using the governing principles of the theory to achieve measurable results. The development of these

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<sup>108</sup> Steven Metz and Raymond Millen. "Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Reconceptualizing Threat and Response," *Strategic Studies Institute* (November 2004). <http://www.StrategicStudiesInstitute.army.mil/html> (accessed August 15, 2007), 25-26. Metz and Millen go into greater detail on this approach than is necessary for this example.

concepts is a field of study that should be considered for a future monograph topic. However, when assessing the value of any global counterinsurgency strategy one should keep in mind the seven caveats articulated by Colin Gray, Professor of International Politics and Strategic Studies at the University of Reading, England, in his study, “Irregular Enemies and the Essence of Strategy: Can The American Way Of War Adapt?” His caveats are summarized as follows: 1) The danger of imposing an undue clarity of strategic distinction; 2) understanding how insurgency works, and therefore how COIN should be pursued, is not necessarily to be able to succeed at COIN; 3) irregular forms of warfare do not, and can never, present us with a single challenge that calls for a single master doctrinal response; 4) that the theory and practice of COIN should not be regarded as a panacea; 5) it may not be politically sensible, or strategically profitable, for American forces to be extensively engaged in COIN operations; 6) a reminder that war and warfare are different concepts, and the difference is a matter of great importance. War is a total relationship—political, legal, social, and military. Warfare is the conduct of war, generally by military means—a narrow focus; and 7) the significance of culture in war, warfare, and strategy, recognized today as never before in recent times at least, is encouraging COIN elevation to the status of panacea.<sup>109</sup> Despite these caveats, this monograph has shown that a global COIN construct is preferable to the current GWOT model. In the end, this monograph has demonstrated that the GWOT construct is no longer sufficient nor relevant in describing the nature of the conflict and the security challenges facing the United States nor does it properly account for the realities of the strategic environment.

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<sup>109</sup> Colin S. Gray, “Irregular Enemies and the Essence of Strategy: Can the American Way of War Adapt?” *Strategic Studies Institute* (March 2006). <http://www.StrategicStudiesInstitute.army.mil/html> (accessed November 15, 2007), 7-12.

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